

Lights and Shadows

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Lights & Shadows

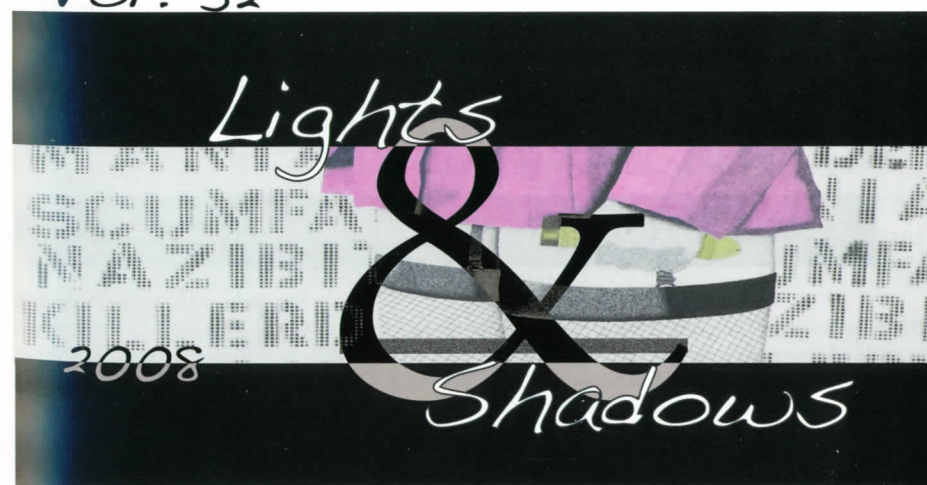


Art & Literary Magazine

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FLORENCE, ALABAMA

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Vol. 52



Art & Literary Magazine

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Editor's Notes

When Hayley and I sat down with the three new editors to begin our year long process of developing *Lights & Shadows*, I mainly wanted two things: first—to keep our pizza off the leaning tower of submissions, and second—I wanted a diverse magazine. It was no secret that Hayley and I had different tastes and interests when it came to literature, but knowing this, I wanted to use these contrasting opinions to create a magazine as wildly varied as it was good. I wanted to show every facet of the wide array of talent we have here at UNA.

Coming off the success and humbling acceptance of the magazine in the past couple of years, Hayley and I naturally only wanted to continue honoring the reputation of the magazine and our beloved school. But just as it goes with trying to recreate the magic of opening night or the success of a certain chocolate chip cookie recipe, all we can do each time is wipe our utensils clean and start fresh with what we have. We tried to ignore the copy of last year's magazine staring over our shoulder from its spotless, golden-gilded display case on the shelf behind us, in order to trudge forward and create something new, substantial, truthful, and wholly-representative of what we felt captured the essence and color of our surroundings. This, I believe, we have accomplished.

Thanks to Hayley, Trey, J.T., and Amber for all your hard work, deliberate intent, and honest criticism, never backing down and fighting for what you liked—and against what you didn't like, even if it was in vain. And thanks to Daryl, for your relaxed good-nature, always supplying us with the right amount of guidance and help when needed, and letting us run the show unless it got too crazy. Thanks to all the writers, and most importantly, thanks to you the reader!

Pierre de Ronsard once wrote, "And you must not worry, as I've said so many times, about the opinions that people might have of your writing, keeping as a firm rule that it is better to be in the service of truth than in the service of opinion." We live in a country where we have been blessed with the right to say what we want without fear of persecution. And as artists, let us never forget how important this gift is, the ability to write and create what is truth.

Happy Reading!

--Matt Mallard

Editor's notes, continued...

The book you hold in your hands is a small miracle. Creating it was an experience – one I will never forget for as long as I live, no matter how hard I try to block it. It was a study in patience, persistence, and learning not to freak out when InDesign decided to do something evil. Thank goodness for the undo command!

The English/editing side of the ordeal was a breeze. Working on last year's (award winning!) journal gave me an idea of what to expect. However, this year I decided to work on the layout and design to give my professional writing degree some use. I discovered I don't have quite the mad desktop publishing skillz I thought I had. After many, many hours of screaming at the computers or at Jesse – mostly at Jesse – I managed to keep most of my hair on my head, and now Jesse doesn't shudder as much when my voice reaches a certain pitch.

Oh, and the journal got finished. Finally. I learned a lot and gained invaluable experience and insight into the world of publishing, which is something I aspire to do in the future.

Expressions of Gratitude:

Amber, Trey, & JT – assistant editors. Thank you for helping with the selection process and putting up with Matt and me butting heads at every meeting.

Matthew Mallard – co-editor. We both still have our heads attached! Thank you for your help editing the manuscript and for your encouragement.

Mr. Fred Hensley in the Art department. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to lecture me about digital resolution in images and granting me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, resolution-wise.

Daryl Brown, the English sponsor. Thank you for putting up with me when I would come to your office or see you in the hall and rant and rave like a gesticulating lunatic about what was going wrong that day. You always managed to calm me down and help me regain my focus.

Mrs. Mary Beth Campbell, the newly-retired Publications Director. Thank you so much for sitting down with me and talking me through my moments of panic and ignorance about producing a publication. I am grateful for your help and support.

Jesse Bradburn, the art designer. Thank you for creating a beautiful cover that stands out and curb-stomps the reader into paying attention.

You, the reader. Without you, we wouldn't have this journal. My hope is that you enjoy reading *Lights & Shadows* as much as all of us enjoyed (really) putting it together.

As it is customary to add a quote to drive the point home, I would like to end with some words from British author GK Chesterton: "Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese."

I expect to see a poem about cheese make it into next year's edition.

--Hayley Sylvester

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This is a blank page. Well, it *was*, but now I'm going to fill it.

We needed this extra page to make the spreads divisible by four for printing. That's why it's here. No other reason why.

I guess since we're waiting, we can make some small talk. Being a writer, I feel obligated to fill up a blank page with something, even if it is inane rambling. I even write on the opposite side of birthday cards just because I hate the sterile, white space.

I bet the suspense for what comes next is killing you. Not me because I totally know what's coming next.

Have you enjoyed your day so far? Mine has been very long, thanks for asking. I ate at Burger King for lunch, and the french fries were faaaabulous. Don't you hate it when you go through the drive-thru somewhere, and even though you don't really have very far to travel to get back to your humble abode, by the time you get home your fries are cold and limp? Man, I hate that. I eat them, solely because I spent the money to purchase them. It's like an obligation when you're on a broke college student budget. If you're gonna pay for food, you may as well eat it to get your money's worth.

Also, I would like to add that we will be accepting submissions for the next issue of *Lights & Shadows*, so please send them as Microsoft Word attachments to lightsandshadows@una.edu. For those of you who aren't English majors and have picked this book up, if you'd like to submit something and you're concerned about not being accepted or if your work is good enough, the Writing Center on campus is full of tutors who will be glad to help you improve your writing skills. That's what they're there for! Get thee to the Writing Center!

Oh, hey, there's Jesse. Say hello, Jesse.

"Hello, Jesse."

Great! We're at the bottom of the page! Thanks for sticking with me this far. Please do enjoy this edition of *Lights & Shadows*. Or I will personally stalk you from the bushes in your front yard and throw rocks at your window while you try to sleep. Big, noisy rocks. Jesse and I worked really hard on this magazine to make it attractive and appealing. It deserves its own display case in your library (or wherever it is you house your books on a broke college student budget).

Thank you for reading!

-- Hayley (and Jesse)



Night Peace

Lynn Moore
Merit

Love Me Tender

Zachary Aaron
Best Poem Award

I had lunch at a meat-and-three
called the Bread Basket—

it's out on the old highway
that goes to Iuka,
and they have to keep the kudzu
cut off the sign (so people from town
can spot the rusty letters)
when they want the "best catfish"
in north Alabama.

Every table has pepper sauce
and chipped wood laminate with
foam peeking through
the vinyl on the chairs
from the paw-paws,
after-church politics
and perpetual plate lunches.

She smelled like deep-fried roses
and she smiled when she asked,
"What can I get you, sweetie?"
like she had known me for years.
"The special comes with cornbread
and banana pudding.
You want tea or Coke?"

I spread out my books
and when she came to check on me
she read, "What is poetry?"
scrawled across my paper.
She folded her arms and said
"I reckon poetry is romantic,
like an Elvis song.
You know...
I seen him one summer."

She looked at me, flashing
a turquoise-dusted eyelid,
as she put extra napkins on the table
and reached to tilt a pitcher
over the jar of ice.

"Poetry is the air that night—
when he sang 'Love Me Tender,'
it tasted sweet and thick
like tupelo honey."

"Mansion Over the Hilltop"

Zachary Aaron

Some nights I sit in bed with my legs crossed and open iTunes and Microsoft Word. Heat radiates from the glowing notebook screen and I put on the playlist called "G'ma and G'pa" to listen to classic gospel music, but especially "Mansion Over the Hilltop." I type; the words and emotions click out on the electronic paper.

By the time the songs play through, I feel a better understanding of myself, who I am and what I'm doing here. It's strange; is it the modern meditation that transforms me? Or, is it visiting with those places and occasions lost in time that don't really call for a photo and are now left to hazy memories?

I can't really even explain why I like the music. I don't drive around in my car listening to gospel songs or really find it to be a particularly cool, private interest. There is just something about its raw and primitive qualities; the rich plainness that reminds me so much of my grandparents and their voices.

To me it is wonderful, and Elvis Presley singing "Mansion Over the Hilltop" is especially remarkable—his lips curling around the monotonous notes; voice dipping, mounting, and falling in waves over the choir and clanging piano; and the coarse emotion humming through harmonic restraint.

My grandparents traded rock and roll for "the gospel hour" sometime in the early '60s, but there was still a box of 45s on a shelf next to yearbooks and delicate flowers to prove that they'd been there and done the twist with Jerry Lee Lewis and Fats Domino.

I stayed with them a lot during the summer, and just inside WJBB Haleyville's listening area, Elvis forced his way through the static of the clock radio that flashed red 12:00 from the windowsill. My grandmother hummed, eyes closed, rocking to his thick voice. I'd watch the rhythmic and orange mute flashes in the cloudy July sky as the wind lifted the heavy lace cascade draped through the large windows. My grandfather knew the words but was quiet, listening to the subtle humming. I'd heard him sing "I've got a mansion, just over the hilltop in that bright land where we'll never grow old," in grating notes from the hymn book we'd shared on many Sundays.

I didn't really know that much about Elvis, just that his mansion was

in Memphis and one of the rooms had green shag carpet and a waterfall. I gathered a rough biography of him over the years though from occasional bits of television specials and radio announcements that I'd caught. He was born in a two-room house in Tupelo, Mississippi—humble beginnings like many of the musical masters of that age. He signed with Sam Philips in Memphis, bought his momma a pink Cadillac, and started wearing flashy clothes. He rocked his hips and rolled his lips on the Ed Sullivan Show, and the country, and then the world, swooned. Elvis married Priscilla, and they smiled from pictures in magazines and newspapers with their daughter. He reigned from Graceland in jeweled jumpsuits, but his marriage failed, and later, so did his heart.

My grandmother said she dropped one of her good dishes and the phone when her sister called her to say that Elvis was gone. She left the porcelain splinters on the floor and spent the afternoon listening to Blue Hawaii.

I wonder if his mansion over the hilltop has a jungle room.

At my grandfather's funeral, the choir led "Mansion over the Hilltop." I could hear someone near me singing "someday yonder we will never more wander, but walk on streets that are pure as gold" in jagged tones, breaking with emotion; I looked around, but the mouth was lost in the mass of dark suits, dresses, and hats. I shared a hymn book with my dad, even though I knew the words. It didn't matter anyway; all I could manage to do was hum through tight lips.

California's For Vampires

Ariyana Spencer

We didn't look like athletes
or teenage girls, already working women
gossiping outside the factory,
having abandoned assembly line
work for long cigarette breaks
minus the rolled cancer between fingers
and balancing chewed pencils instead,
scene still out of context
during the fourth period girls Physical
Education class, the last one they'll make

us take. Notebooks spread over the laps
of empty bleachers instead of pale legs,
quaking at the pound of sneakers on wood
planks, the broken rhythm of basketball
players vibrating our words as they spill
over rim onto new pages, "nothing but net,"
sound whistle as mental typewriters ring, new
page. Stories of vampires, a present interest,
seducing female protagonists in outlines
of what's to come, lists of interesting names
for the minor villains of chapter thirteen,
poetry in margins drawn into the shape
of faces when muses abandon. I see

more of these poems, written in the wood
below my books in messy hand and crooked
hearts, initials playing Tetris as they line up
with potentials. "Wouldn't it," my partner in
crime mutters, "be good to be known?"

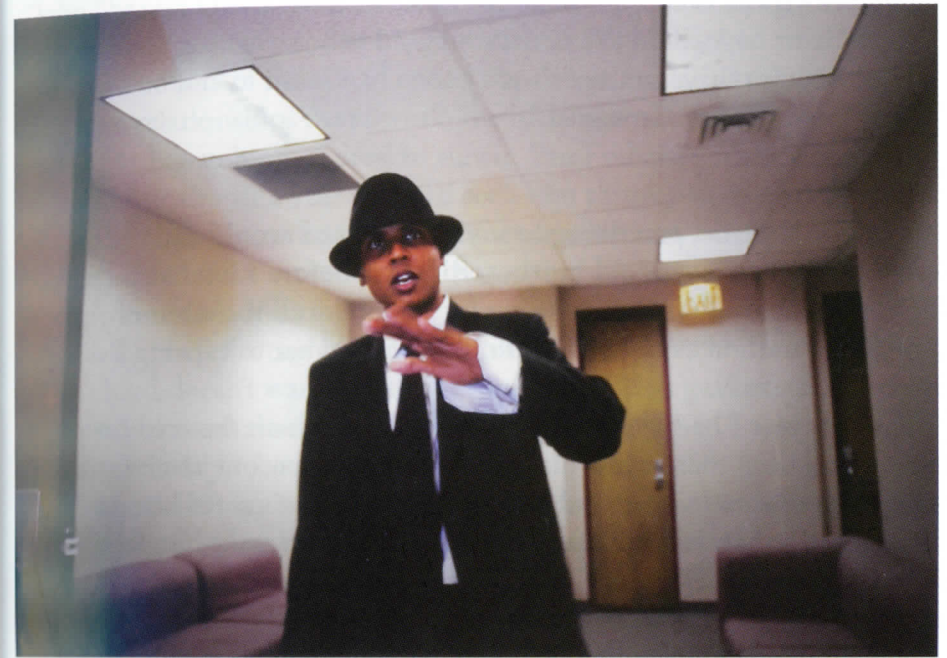
For not being the girl in black who writes
about blood sucking romantics?
"So long as we're not typecast."
Like Bella Lugosi. We saw the movie
before we read the book

and hoped our stories weren't tainted
with rubber bats or short pants, dripping
accents from gray places. Bella, we forgot
in place of Dracula, both buried
in their capes in sunny California.

"Is it good?"

"As good as our poetry," hopeful wet eyes pray

to me and I agree. It's the same, just the same as
Bella's ode joining Ed Wood's in Plan 9
from Outer Space (before the inspiration to rhyme left
our dear vampire). Imitation of imitation
as Plato said, our poetry of vampires who died
in Cali, pretending to be alive, original. Magic
will happen if you carve a letter
into a bleacher board, if the muses abandon
and monsters are in Hollywood, where poetry
is better budgeted and less ours.



Michael Jackson Impersonator

Jacob Jones
Merit

Smaller Bridges and Simple Lyrics

Sandy Morris

"I'm sorry you have cancer."

"I'm sorry you have leukemia."

"I'm sorry you're sick."

"I'm sorry."

I was on a plane, practicing in my head what I would say to my ex-boyfriend's 13 year old brother, Richard, before I landed in San Francisco. I shouldn't have changed the channel all those times the St. Jude marathon came on TV. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what to say.

The past year I had seen my grandfather lay weak on the cold hospital bed. I had been there while his organs gave up hope, one after another. I had looked into his eyes and told him that it was time for him to go if he was tired, that we'd be fine. I knew what to say to make him feel better. To make myself feel better. This was different. I didn't know how to lie to a boy.

A man in a turban nudged his way past my legs and sat in the window seat next to me. After minutes of awkward silence he asked, "This the plane to San Francisco?" I nodded. For just a second, September 11th crossed my mind. I clicked the play button on my Discman and put on my headphones as the plane lifted from the runway. The Beatles' *White Album*.

I skipped through the first six songs on the *White Album* to get to "Blackbird." The foreign guy tapped my shoulder and gestured for me to take the headphones off.

"You listen to Beatles?" he asked in broken English.

"Yeah. I'm sorry. Is it too loud?"

"No, no. Please I listen after you?"

We took turns with the headphones at the end of each song. I didn't mind though. The *White Album* was my least favorite. When it was his turn, I watched him lip-synch and bob his head. The family seated across from us stopped exchanging nervous glances. They quit biting their lips. They smiled at him. He wasn't a terrorist.

We were somewhere in the middle of *Let It Be* when our pilot informed us that if we looked out the window, we could see the Bay Bridge. I couldn't see the Bay Bridge. I didn't have a window seat. My

new friend didn't see it either. He just kept bobbing his head.

While getting off the plane, I asked him who his favorite Beatle was. "John," he said. I never asked his name. We didn't even bother saying goodbye.

I met my ex-boyfriend at baggage claim. We exchanged small hugs. Cancer and lots of miles had ended our five year relationship. "Long distance relationships never work," he had said over the phone. "Plus gas is getting so high. I need to stay in San Francisco with Richard." It had been almost a year since I'd seen him throw plastic bags full of clothes into his car to get to California as soon as he could. The whole time he had sat a hospital room, carrying inside him the marrow Richard needed. Waiting for the chemotherapy to kill Richard's cells. Watching the effects it had on his brother's body.

"Richard doesn't want you to see him today. He's got bad ulcers, and he's embarrassed about the way he looks."

I was selfishly relieved.

We spent the day in the city. Over iced mochas, we watched the seals perched against buoys at Fisherman's Wharf. We visited art galleries, thrift stores, souvenir shops, Alcatraz. We ate clam chowder on the street corner with the locals, until greasy rats jumped from the sewage grates to steal food from tourists' hands. We drove over the Golden Gate Bridge four times, just in case I would never get to see it again.

In the car that night, on the way to my hotel, I saw the Bay Bridge. It was not majestic and showy like the Golden Gate. It was as simple as a clean sheet of paper. I thought it was beautiful. We drove over it five times.

The next morning Richard's mother, Mary, met me at the hotel, and we walked to Stanford Children's Hospital to see Richard. It was his fourteenth birthday. I'd known him for three birthdays now. All that time I'd never have thought cancer cells were somewhere in him, waiting for the day they could make it public to him and the people who loved him the most.

Before he was sick, he would always walk into the living room and squeeze between his brother and me in the middle of a movie. He hung posters of girls in bikinis on every wall of their bedroom. He burped when I came over for dinner. In the summer, he'd refuse to shower for days. But he'd sit on the porch steps with me when I'd come over after having an argument with my mom. He'd tell me corny jokes until I'd smile.

We got off the elevator on the third floor. Nurses pulled small,

pale children in red wagons covered with clear plastic tents and connected to an I.V. pole, which was trailing behind.

"Those are the ones almost in remission," Mary whispered as they passed. "They're the healthy ones about to be moved to another floor." I watched them roll by in their convoy of Radio Flyers. Their sunken eyes were too weak to look up at me. I saw them as weak but mending soldiers moving from the front lines on floor three, leaving behind the ones who couldn't make it. I wondered if the horrors they'd seen would show in their eyes—when they were able to lift them.

Room 314 was at the end of the hall. There was a small room we had to pass through before reaching Richard's. The Decontamination Room. A nurse followed us in, to make sure that we scrubbed our hands and arms the correct number of times. We scrubbed more times than she told us to.

Mary wanted us to pray. We moved behind the side of the window with a curtain, so Richard couldn't see us trying to bargain with God. She held hands with the nurse and said the Lord's Prayer so quietly I could barely hear. We were so discreet, like we were doing something wrong.

The nurse took the birthday present I brought to give Richard. "This has to be sterilized before we can bring it in to him. He can probably get it tomorrow," she said.

I went into the room last. I knew Richard still didn't want me there. When he saw me, he turned his head away and towards the floor. His feet and hands were soaking in trays of ice. "The radiation burns his skin," Mary whispered. His hair was gone. Even his eyebrows and eyelashes. His face was swollen and yellow. The ulcers he was ashamed of were bleeding into gauze covering his lips.

He nodded his head toward his mother. When she met his gaze, he looked to the side of his bed and started to cry. She asked me to leave the room. He didn't want me to see his kidney bag while it filled with urine. When I was allowed back in, the bag had been moved to the other side.

I didn't say anything. I didn't even say, "Hey, Rich." The way he looked scared me. For two hours I hid in the corner.

"I need some fresh air. Do you mind staying here with Richard?" I shook my head. She left us alone together.

Richard pretended to watch cartoons. His mouth was still bleeding. He saw me looking at the blood. He cried. I cried back. "I'm sorry," I said. "I'm sorry I didn't say hi."

I moved closer to him. I sat on the edge of his bed. I was afraid for him to breathe my air, afraid that I'd contaminate his body. I took his Bible off the end table and I held it in my lap. I patted the part of his head where he once had hair. Leaning against his shoulder, I did the first thing that came into my mind; I whispered words of a Beatles' song:

"the sun is up
the sky is blue
it's beautiful
and so are you"*

I saw ice moving in one of his foot trays. His right foot was swaying along.

*The Beatles. "Dear Prudence." *The White Album*. Apple Records, 1968.

Nursing Home

Trey Canida

We have come, my mother and I,
to say hello, feels like goodbye
with weak hugs and wet cheek kisses
and whispered I love you's repeated
just in case

Hand and jaw shake from the disease
Crippling her slowly
Feet thick with socks
For warmth
Her body can't provide

She's not alone
Room shared
With another woman
Who controls the television
And the conversation

My grandmother looks sad
And happy about her roommate
Sad because she is 87
Sharing a room with a stranger
Happy because she is 87
Sharing a room with anyone

The Young and the Resting

Matthew Mallard

I sit perched on the floor with my older sister, twin brother, younger brother, and my younger cousin. Our heads are crowded together, as if we are plotting a dastardly deed, a scheme so abominable only the five of us could plan.

"I dare you to go touch her hair," my sister Danielle challenges.

"No!" I grimace.

"Go touch her hand!" Benjamin laughs.

"Ew!" our cousin Maghen recoils.

"Okay," Nicholas says as he stands up. The rest of us gasp as we follow my twin into the chapel. All five of us speed-walk, as if we are five middle-aged women attempting to burn twenty or thirty pounds of our fat away with a few laps around a shopping mall. Nicholas reaches our destination first with Benjamin close behind.

There lays Great-grandmother Pratt, smiling, looking better than she has in over a decade. Her frizz of poofy white hair sits on top of her head, and her wrinkled but painted hands lie crossed on her breast. Danielle gives Great-grandmother Pratt's hair a ruthless pat, and Nicholas pokes at her hands. She does not respond. We stifle our giggles as we stampede back into one of the waiting rooms of the funeral home.

Our mission is successful.

We are triumphant.

I can now recall visiting Grandmother Pratt, when she was alive, in the nursing home after church on Sundays. She was my mother's mother's mother. She had Alzheimer's, and at the time, I just took it for what it was. I understood that whenever we went to visit, she would not recognize her own daughter, or her granddaughter, and certainly not me, her great-grandson. But I understood little else.

However, now looking back, I don't know how my grandmother did it. Going to visit her mother, day after day, month after month, year after year after year after year—how she was able to keep it together for so long. Maybe she gradually grew numb from the experience, but I think there was a strength, a beautiful strength in love and family that my grandmother was able to show.

"Blanche, do you remember me?" my grandmother asked every visit.

"Hmm?" Great-grandmother Pratt would mumble.

"It's Mary," my grandmother prodded. "I'm your daughter, Mary."

I think of the possibility of my own parents having dementia one day far from now, and the notion lies restless and unsettling on my mind. I can not imagine walking into a place reeked with death and age and sickness, only to have my parents not know my face, my eyes, my name, not to know their son or even that they have a son.

But I never heard my grandmother complain; I never saw the slightest trace of strain in her eyes. She would sit beside the bed in the hospital-like room, feeding ice cream to the woman who didn't know her own daughter. Meanwhile, Danielle and I would roam restlessly, wanting ice cream for ourselves, anticipating the tradition of our grandparents taking us to Hardee's afterwards for peach milkshakes.

I think of Great-grandmother Pratt now and remember visiting her in the nursing home and standing near her grave at the cemetery. I also remember the five of us daring each other to touch her resting body at visitation. We were young, and there was an absence of understanding in us, an absence of strength.

My great-grandmother, Alpharetta Blanche Bracheen Pratt, died on November 8, 1997. I was ten years old; she was 95.



Turtles on a Tree

Hiroko Kanazawa

Merit

They say that throughout life, your mind will go through 3 stages: childhood, adulthood, and then a return to childhood. I have always thought this to be true, especially as a kid visiting my relatives. The senile old ladies, who were once living at home, filling their jars high with hard candy and sucking down the smoke of every Saratoga their money could buy. I would stand there in the crowded room, watching as my parents would attempt to talk to them, the entire time wondering when we were going to leave the nursing home. I was ready to go eat lunch, go to the movies, or whatever we had planned for that Sunday. For a while, I felt guilty for being so selfish, but not so much anymore... 'cause compared to going to lunch or to the movies or watching people suffer and slowly die is depressing and boring as hell.

When the tables change, it's often hard to cope with your new seating arrangement. My back was killing me. I needed to use the bathroom, but the male nurse was on duty, and I'm pretty sure he's gay, so I decided to wait. The one good thing about my room was the view. My room directly faced a red brick wall. My impressions of the modern world came from lights, shadows, and sounds. The passing cars would shine a ghastly glow across the plain, white walls, providing the only decoration the room had ever seen. The sirens of the police cars, racing back and forth, pulsed their multicolored lights. They would reflect off my mirror and onto the ceiling and into the hall, filling the room with warm light, giving me a natural high...an ecstasy off-brand. For entertainment, I would watch the shadows of people walking through the alley below, often holding hands, sometimes throwing fists. Once, I listened as a woman got beaten to death. Her screams cut sharply through me like a shark clamping his jaws down into my skin ever so slowly. Their shadows were horrific. I watched her as she fell, never to get back up. There was nothing I could do. I tried to warn the nurses, but they only thought I was off on another one of my "tangents" or throwing another one of my "fits." I wonder how stupid those jackasses felt when they saw the police arrive and found the body. If I could have said, "I told you so!" I would have.

My door opened slowly. I opened my eyes and glanced to my right to see my son and his family walking into my stuffy little room. This

is always an interesting experience for me. They all say their hellos to me as if I were a child. They quietly prompted the small one to come up and give me a hug. They began to fill me in on their lives... how good the kids were doing in school, how the business was doing, etc. This amused me, as they would tell me the same bull crap every time...so I showed a little smirk. "Look," said my son, "he's smiling! He knows we're here!" I know I raised him and all that, but sometimes my son is an idiot. I would like to think that he knew me well enough to know why I was smiling...he knows I wouldn't be smiling to see him. He's the one that stuck me in this damn place. I think he did know, he just didn't want to acknowledge it or bring it up in front of the kids. My father once told me that true friends--the ones you know you can rely on, the ones you know you can trust, the ones who truly love you--are the ones that stand beside you through the good and the bad. I had no impression of my son being a "true friend." On a cold, December night he got the news that I was going down-hill--motor skills, communication skills, basic living skills--all fading. He looked straight at the doctor, right in the eye, without any thought at all, and told him that they were just gonna have to put me away. Hmmm...I guess the cold really turns people cold. "Putting me away?" Sounds like they were trying to lock me up, but I guess since I had committed no crime, they stuck me in this prison. But hey, they imprisoned me and come to visit me, too. I guess that instead of being a total bastard, my son's just a bastard. But that's like saying that Hitler was a total psycho, and Manson was just a psycho. I'm pretty sure they both use the same bathroom in hell...the one labeled "Psycho."

They said their goodbyes and were on their way. I was relieved to see them go, but I still missed them in a way, since here I was again...by myself...no human interaction. It killed me how they worried so much about their idiot president, their taxes, their celebrities. Sitting here in my room, my television rerunning old episodes of "The Andy Griffith Show," I was happy. I didn't care who ran this country or how high the taxes were. That was the one good thing about this place. Carelessness. My mind had no bias whatsoever. It was not influenced by political affiliations, mainstream religion, or any other crap. It was truly and unequivocally me. For the first time in my life, I was an individual. I didn't have to worry about family, friends, or what some girl found "attractive"...I was here. It was me.

Since I'm old and stereotyped, the TV was constantly left on TV

Land. I began to hear the ever-annoying theme song to "Leave It to Beaver." This show was not so bad during the time it was made, I just hate the false societal impressions it gives people today. There was no magical "Leave It To Beaver" period. There is no special period in history that we need to revert back to for better family and societal values. This magical "Leave It To Beaver" period was riddled with guides for housewives, and spousal abuse was labeled as "a man's prerogative." Every decade has it's problems...Hitler, McCarthy, whatever...never think you have worse, or better than anyone else. That's when you lose touch, that's when you only visit your own flesh-and-blood whenever church gets out early, and you have no previous plans. Just like that girl who will break your heart, just like that couple who aborts their mistake, just like the deniers of the Holocaust...responsibility seems to be a damn shame. You grow out of your parents, you want to get out, but when you finally do, you wanna go stick your mouth right back on your mom's breast, but she pushes you away. The river that once fed you, once guided your way, is now dry. I find it quite confusing. But these are the things of the past. These are the things which I used to worry about. Now all I know are this TV, this brick wall, this gay nurse, the smell of human waste, and the lady next door mooing like a cow. I once worried about normal things...when I was alive...but now I am truly alive. I tried to watch some TV but started to drift off.

I could hear it...those annoying themes. "The Andy Griffith Show," "Happy Days," etc. They were all mixing together into a hellish screeching noise...so loud, so brutal, my ears almost bleeding. It was dark, but it was bright. It was so warm but ever so cold. It was the mix...the middle of all things. I knew where I was. Death. This was it. This was my time to shine. I have heard it said that death is the road to awe...and oh, I was in awe. They were all there: Andy, Goober, George Jefferson, Fred Sanford, God, The Devil, Cosby and that damn cigar...they were all there. They were all standing in a line, guns pointed straight at me. These people, I once loved, were standing there, ready to kill me at a moments notice. Such is life. They were all standing in a straight line, guns pointed directly at me, staring right into my eyes. Suddenly a small child, dressed as a priest, came walking through the line of killers. It was Beaver. He carried a book, a large, black book. He opened the book and began to speak.

"Of all the liars, and all the bastards that could be dying right now, it

looks like you're the one. Doesn't seem fair to you but not much will in this life. For we measure ourselves by our judgments, by our laws, and by our commandments. But the true measure will only come at death. Without death, birth would prove insignificant, and without birth, death would be the beginning. I know not of you or who you are. I know not of your trespasses or your good deeds. All I know at this very moment is that you are here. Your death has been set into motion. This draws me to one question, the one question I am always brought to, the one overbearing question. You are here, dying. All the ones who have kept you company when your family abandoned you are standing here ready to kill you at a moment's notice. The one small child who would piss you off at his make-believe perfect life is here to judge you. Our fingers are on the trigger. Do you believe? Do you believe your death should be now? Should it be here? Is it your time...your time to end...your time to die?" I never had been asked anything like this before. I knew I wanted to say yes...but I shook my head no. He looked up at me again and nodded.

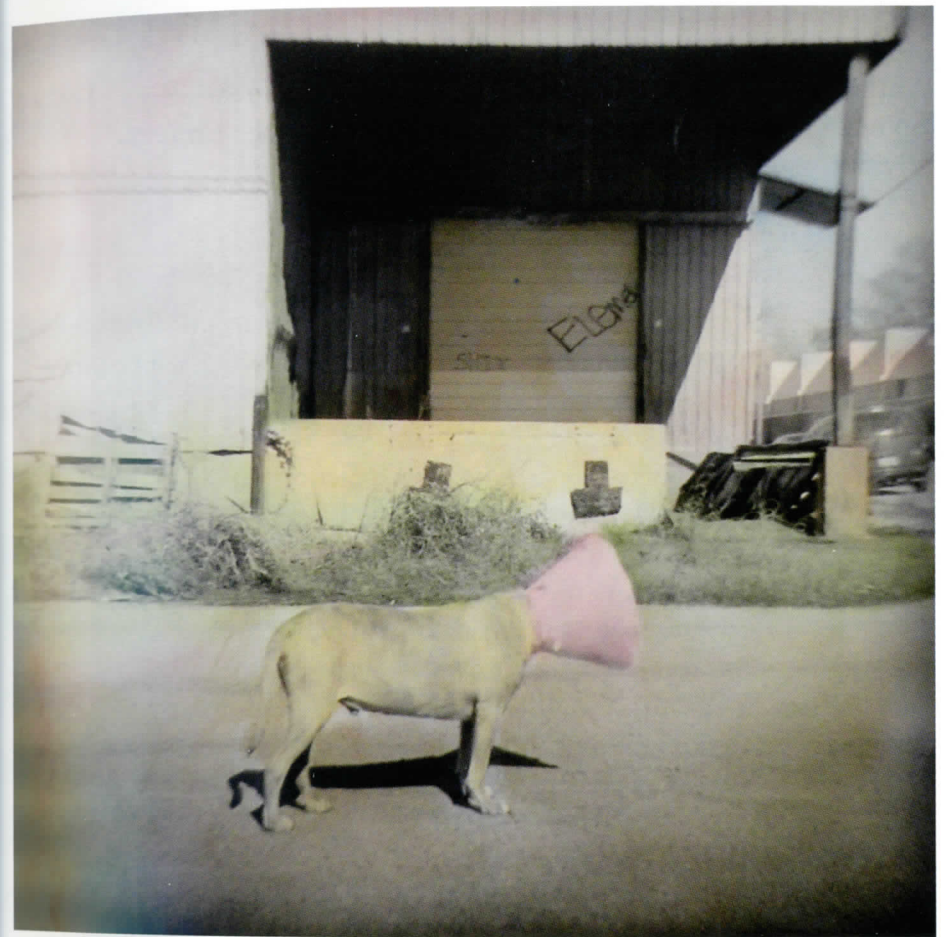
I opened my eyes, only to see that damn TV playing "The Andy Griffith Show" again. I looked around. The nurse left my food when I was asleep. Well, let's just say they call it "food." I smelled the same old horrible smell, I heard the same old mooing, and I was eating the same old crap I always was. I kinda wished I was dead. But then again, I kinda didn't. Hahahaha...oh, no I didn't. So what do you expect me to do now? Hahaha, I bet not this.

I look over...it's 3:37...this date, this time will go down in history. It's time to make history. I sit up in the bed. I rip out all my cords, all my wires, and whatever else they had stuck in me. I can't even begin to describe how good it feels when my feet touch the ground for the first time in years. At first I fall...but the feeling slowly returns back to my legs. I run into the hall, trying to avoid nurses, and any of those other idiots. I run into the room of that old cow. She mooed louder than ever. I grabbed her up, all of her IVs ripping out of her skin, spraying blood across the floor. She didn't seem to care. I carried her. I was filled with so much adrenaline she seemed weightless. We ran through the halls, everyone looking out their doors at us. We motioned for them to come. They did. We ran as fast as our old legs could take us. We grabbed the beer from the nurses' break room and chugged it as we ran, the ol' cow pouring it into my mouth for me as though to pay me back for carrying her. Man, it's been so long since I've had a

Heineken. I knocked on Betty's door as we ran...I had always thought she was cute. She came running out, bloody from her missing IVs, and looking ever so beautiful. I didn't ask any questions. I went straight to kissing her. I kissed her more passionately than I have anyone in years... maybe ever. We started to run again, faster than before. We could see the light pouring in from the door. We were almost there. We ran through the big double doors and smelled the fresh air. It had been far too long. We ran through the parking lot screaming, not sure exactly where we were going but sure that we weren't going to make it very far.

The nurses had begun to come outside. They didn't even run after us. They were frozen. They were shocked. We began to drop. One by one, the bodies fell to the ground. I must be one of the last ones to go down. Suddenly I feel it. I'm running out of breath. I'm falling, as if in slow motion. I can see the firing squad over me, fingers on the triggers. Andy, George, Beaver, and all my friends ready to send me off. The parking lot was filled with bodies, blood covering almost every inch of asphalt. We hit the ground, the ol' cow still in my arms. She looked at me, smiling. For the first time ever in a completely normal voice, she looked at me with a huge, content grin on her face and said, "Moo."

It was once said that you're not ready to live until you're ready to die. There was death at 3:37. There was glory at 3:37...at 3:37.



Untitled 1

Jacob Jones
Merit

And When I See Your Face, I Throw Up

Pat Howard

Anthony says birthdays are like a personalized New Year's Eve.
So much promise, deflated by vomit and other disappointments.
Vividly orange like shag carpeting, chunky to the touch,
 Splashing like a puddle into itself,
 Tasting like stale store-brand Corn Chex,
 Smelling foul like a roadkill skunk.

Better yet – it smells like a nightmare tastes.

This vomit belongs to Anthony Burress of Frostbite Falls, Minnesota –
No, Anthony was from Bismarck, North Dakota –

I had a great aunt who used to live in Bismarck. She was a nun.

A nun would never try to put vajayjay in the dictionary, but

 Shonda Rhimes would. Anthony might, as well, for that matter.

Anthony enjoys reference materials, so he's always up for a challenge.

"Whatchoo talkin' 'bout, Willis?" I never watched that show,
 but I heard someone say it today.

The stunning breadth of language never ceases to amaze me

Like floodwaters, clearing what came before for something new.

Sometimes I think I'd like to jump rope with God,

Paturkey and His Holiness doing double dutch on the concrete,

 Chanting words humans haven't invented yet.

All of this will come to pass at His own appointed time

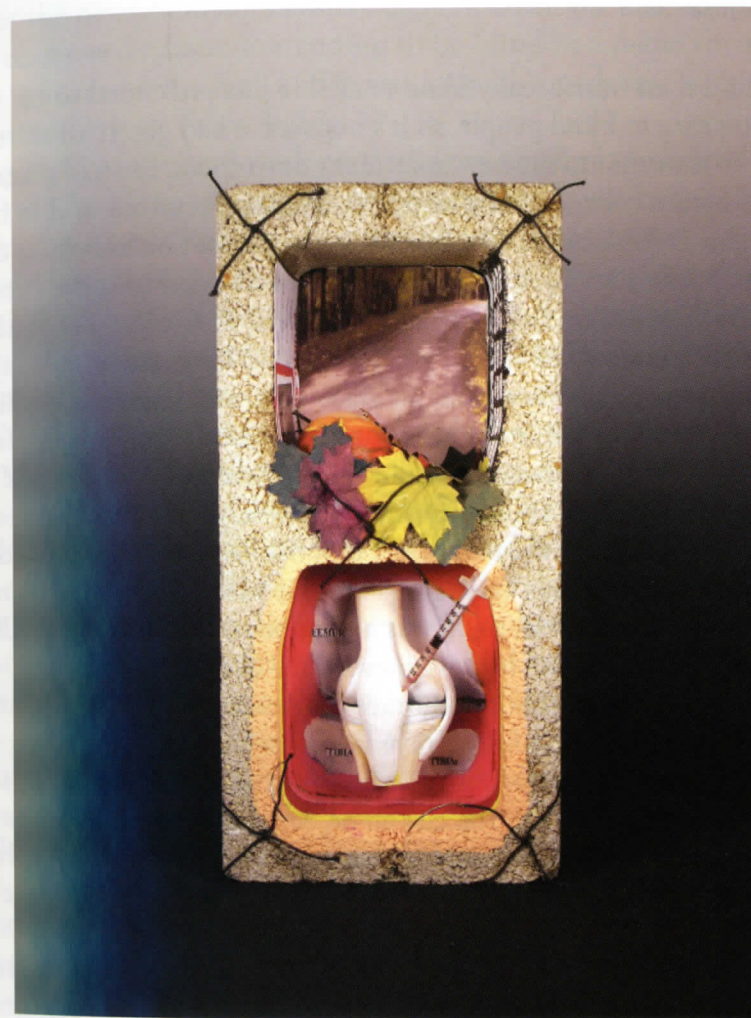
 (as if God would restrict himself to human concepts of time).

The paradox of eternity is an end unto itself.

La forza del destino – the power of fate.

The language is as dead as the idea, according to Anthony.

But he's not the one cleaning vomit out of the carpet.



Flashback

Elizabeth Miller
Merit

The Blind Man

Trey Canida

The blind man wasn't really blind at all. He just pretended to be. Most people are nice to blind people, so it's not such a bad gig. It all started on the day he moved into his new apartment downtown. He had recently graduated from college with a degree in English literature, and to his surprise, his father's belief that companies would not be knocking down his door to offer him a job had come true. He decided to move here, to the city, in hopes of finding opportunity as well as to escape his father's constant exclamations of "I told you you should have had a real major."

One of his neighbors saw him, sunglasses on, with one hand feeling his way up the stairs while the other hand clutched a duffle bag. He could see just fine. His neighbor didn't know that and asked him if he needed help. Before he could answer, his new neighbor grabbed the bag from his hands, and by the end of the day, the neighbor had helped the blind man move all of his belongings into his new apartment. Soon after that, word got around that there was a blind man living in G11. All of his new neighbors helped him whenever they could.

At first, he was reluctant to embrace his perceived blindness, but eventually he accepted it fully. There are some people who hate it when people feel sorry for them, but the blind man was not one of those people. He knew no one in the city so he decided pretending to be blind could be a viable option for meeting new people. At least, that's why he told himself he had done it. The truth was really more about the fact that he had all of the perks of being blind without the obvious setback.

Pretending to be blind proved harder than the blind man could have ever foreseen. For instance, he almost blew his cover the very first day when he attempted to unlock his mailbox in the lobby while standing right next to the neighbor that had just helped him move all of his belongings up five flights of stairs. The new neighbor quickly grabbed the blind man's key, telling him he would be happy to open the blind man's mailbox since obviously the blind man would have a hard time unlocking the mailbox himself. Then there was the time the blind man had made the idiotic mistake of carrying a newspaper under his arm as he used his newly purchased walking stick to guide him up the stairs. He had run into another neighbor on the way up. An attractive blond who lived on his hallway. The blond had noticed the

blind man was carrying a newspaper and was obviously dumbfounded by it. But the blind man quickly saved himself by saying he had picked it up at the newsstand for another neighbor down the hall who the blind man owed a favor. Pretending to be blind had made the man much quicker on his feet, and it was only his quick thinking which prevented his ruse from failing.

Despite all of the hard work pretending to be blind presented, the blind man loved the city and his new apartment. It was in the high rise building on Pike Street. One street over from Palmetto, the main road through downtown. He was close enough to walk to a nice coffee shop he had discovered, one block down and one block over on Miller. He walked there every morning, but he had to be careful about crossing the street. Although he could see when the crosswalk sign was lit up, he would have to ask a person standing beside him to tell him when it was ok to walk. That way he kept up his appearance of being blind. With his stick scurrying back and forth in front of him and his dark sunglasses covering his eyes, he truly did look like a blind man.

One day after he walked out of the coffee shop with his twenty dollar bill still intact in his wallet (another advantage of being blind is that people give you free stuff), the blind man decided to walk to the bookstore a couple of blocks away. This particular book store had a wide variety of Braille, and although he couldn't read Braille, he would trace his fingers over the dots, mumbling words softly to himself, producing the desired effect.

As he entered the bookstore, the blind man noticed a woman sitting with her legs folded beneath her in one of the chairs in the corner. He almost did a double take in her direction before he remembered that he was supposed to be blind. She was the most beautiful woman the blind man had ever seen. She held a copy of *Love in the Time of Cholera* in one hand, and her other hand twirled a strand of hair in anticipation of the next page turn. Her eyes were focused intently on the words on the page. The blind man realized that he was obviously staring at her and quickly made his way to the Braille section. A sign hung above the section read "Braille," in giant block letters, and the blind man always laughed to himself about this.

The blind man reached for a copy of *Love in the Time of Cholera*. While it happened to be one of his favorites, the fact was also not lost on him that it was the same book being read by the woman in the corner. He had further noticed that no one was sitting in the chair beside

her. With his walking stick leading the way, the blind man made his way towards the woman. He walked until the stick touched the front of the chair. Then, he raised the stick up and thoroughly scanned the seat of the chair to make sure no one was in it. The woman noticed that the man about to sit down beside her was obviously blind.

"There's no one there," she offered. "Seat's yours."

"Oh, sorry. Didn't mean to be rude," the blind man said. "I didn't see you there."

The girl was speechless.

"It's ok to laugh. Blind joke. Not very funny."

She managed to let out a gentle laugh. Just like that, the blind man had broken the ice. Before becoming blind, he had always had trouble starting conversations. Especially with beautiful women. Now, he had a certain confidence with women. There was just something about being able to look at a woman without her knowing you are looking at her.

"What are you reading?" asked the blind man.

"How'd you know I was reading?" the girl asked back.

"Well, you're sitting in a chair at a bookstore. You're either reading or you're just staring at other people in the store. I don't get a creepy vibe from you, so I went with the former."

"You're funny," she said. "And I'm reading *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Ever read it?"

"Well, I was about to read part of it now. It's one of my favorites," he said holding his Braille copy up for her to see, amazed himself at how easy being blind made picking up women.

"That's some coincidence," she said. "My name's Samantha."

"And I'm Jacob," he said, extending his hand towards her, asking for intimacy, for her touch, if only for a moment.

"Nice to meet you, Jacob," she said, taking his hand in hers.

"If I may be frank with you..." started the blind man.

"Of course," Samantha said.

"This is going to sound really funny, but can I touch your face?" asked the blind man. A move that would have been a conversation killer for anyone else was the blind man's best technique.

"Right to the point, huh?" She laughed. "Actually, it's ok."

"You wouldn't mind?" he asked, trying to sound sensitive.

"No. Go ahead. It would actually make me feel better I think. Then you'd know what I looked like," she said.

He slowly reached his hands towards her face, feeling first her cheeks

then sliding his hands up to her forehead and gently down across her eyes, nose, mouth, and chin.

"You're beautiful," he said.

"Can you really get a picture of me by feeling my face?" she asked.

"You don't even know what color my hair is or my eyes or anything."

"I really don't have to know those things. I really didn't even have to feel your face. Just from talking to you, I knew you were beautiful. You have an enchanting personality," he said, trying hard not to laugh at his own brilliance. He noticed her face begin to color, and he knew he had her.

"That was probably the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me," she said reaching for his hand, finding it, and giving it a gentle squeeze, letting him know that she appreciated compliments.

"I just feel a connection with you," he said. "Like we've met before or something."

"I know what you mean. I feel like I can just talk to you and you will listen. With most guys, you worry about them staring down your shirt or at some other girl walking by, but I know you are focused just on listening to me," she said smiling.

"Even if I had fully functioning eyeballs, I promise I would still listen to you," he said.

"If you don't mind my asking, how did you become blind?" she asked.

The blind man had answered this question so many times over the last couple of months that he actually started believing the story himself. "It happened when I was a boy, nine actually." This part of the story had changed slightly with the telling of his story. The first time he told it, he was nineteen. But women seemed to feel more sympathy for him if it happened when he was young.

"My older brother was driving me to school one day, and we were running late. We were coming up on a red-light, and it was obvious we wouldn't make it through. My brother hit the accelerator hard, planning on running the light," he said, almost whispering the words. The blind man was a dynamic story teller. He was so good at lying, so accomplished, that he could make the woman cry at any moment. All he had to do was finish the story.

"Well, the light turned quicker than my brother thought it would, but he was already committed to running it. That's when we saw the little girl with her dog."

"Little girl?" Samantha asked, the tears welling up in her eyes. "Oh no."

"Luckily he saw her in time. He swerved to the right as hard as he

could. Away from the oncoming traffic but towards a light pole," the blind man said. Somehow he managed to get a tear to run down his face. She grabbed the blind man's hand, holding it tightly for support.

"My brother was ok. No serious injuries. Just cuts and bruises and stuff. But I wasn't. I was wearing my seatbelt but my head got slammed against the dashboard. I will always remember that little girl's face. It was the last thing I ever saw," said the blind man, slumping his shoulders and allowing Samantha to hold him in her arms.

"You must feel such anger sometimes. I can't imagine losing my eyesight," the woman said.

"I try not to think of it that way. I just know that I'm alive. If we would have hit that girl, she probably wouldn't have made it. I'm blind so that she could live," the blind man said, well aware that his story had had its desired effect. The woman cried softly as she held his head to her chest.

"You're so brave," she whispered in his ear.

"It's not bravery. Just the right thing to do," said the blind man as he raised his head up.

A look of regret and hope was etched on her face. "Listen, I have to go, but can I give you my number? I would really love to go out for coffee sometime. I mean if you would want to," she asked.

"Sure," he said reaching into his pocket. "Think I've got a pen. Yep. Here it is," he said handing her the pen and sticking his hand out for her to write her number on his palm.

"How will you read it?" she asked puzzled.

"Just kidding," said the blind man, hoping his stupidity would not cost him. "Just say it. I've got a photographic memory."

Samantha told him her number, and he repeated again after her, making sure he had it correctly.

"That's right," she said, getting up from her chair. "And I really hope you call. I've never met anyone like you."

"I've never met anyone like you either," he said.

She grabbed her purse and turned toward the door. As she walked out, the blind man pulled the pen from his pocket and began to write her number on his hand. But he couldn't remember her number. He repeated different combinations in his head but none of them were right. He retraced their conversation, the words she had said to him, trying desperately to remember her number, but it wouldn't come. The blind man had used this particular routine on several

women, usually successfully, but none of those women had been as beautiful as this one. If the blind man had been spiritual, he might have thought it was karma. Instead, he decided to do something about it before it was too late.

He walked briskly toward the exit, forgetting to wave his walking stick in front of him. When he opened the door, he could see the woman walking away from the store on the other side of the street. He screamed her name, but she apparently did not hear him. He bolted after her, oblivious to all around him.

The blind man did not even see the car coming. True, he had forgotten to check both ways before he ran out into the street, but his attention was focused so intently on the woman that he probably wouldn't have seen the car even if he would have looked. He was blind to everything else around him.

Fortunately for the blind man, the driver of the car did see him. Just as the blind man stepped into the street with his walking stick at his side rather than in front of him, the driver slammed on his brakes, grinding to a screeching stop before giving the blind man a little bump with his fender. Hard enough to knock the blind man down, but easy enough to cause no real injury. Had the driver been one fraction of a second slower, the blind man could have been severely injured if not dead. As it was, the blind man was more embarrassed than anything else.

The other pedestrians on both sides of the sidewalk turned toward the sound of the screeching brakes and saw the man lying in the middle of the road. Samantha had turned around just in time to see the blind man hit the ground, and she, along with more of the pedestrians, raced across the street in front of the stopped cars and to the side of the blind man.

"Oh my God, are you ok, Jacob?" she asked him, her eyes still red from his story.

"I think so. I don't think I broke anything," he said as he sat up, adjusting his sunglasses with one hand while the other hand rubbed down the length of both of his legs.

"Can you stand?" she asked, taking one of his arms and wrapping it around her.

"I think so," he said, as she helped him to his feet.

Aided by Samantha, the blind man took a few steps down the sidewalk with only a slight limp in his left leg. An ankle sprain was his guess.

"What happened?"

"As soon as you walked out, I realized I had forgotten your number, and I tried to come after you because I didn't want that to be the last time I ever saw you," said the blind man, allowing his quick reflexes to find a promising conclusion to the embarrassing situation.

"You came after me, risking yourself, just to get my number?" she asked amazed. "You just keep surprising me."

"I'm full of surprises," said the blind man.

"This might be a little up front, but do you want to come back to my place. I just live right up the street. I could take a look at you, make sure everything's ok. I'm a nurse at the hospital."

"That's sounds great, but you have to promise me you won't take advantage of me," said the blind man, as Samantha helped him to the other side of the street. "I don't know how much of a fight a blind cripple can put up."

Seduction Reduction

Noah Sweat

Wielding my usual tools, my wit, wallet & watch
Everything I need for my specific purpose
I'm a sucker for light eyes and dark hair
a specific pleasure,

Among several.

Ready to focus and steady my mind, my hand never shakes.

Every action, every word deliberate and precise.

with some creative calculation

at my usual haunt, success is all but

Guaranteed. No hesitation. A space

Opens, I slide myself

In. Sly and nonchalant,

Not even a slight nod, mild disinterest...

Greeting the bartender who knows me so well

a slight brush against her, intentional incidental contact

"excuse me," as if surprised to see her

The rest of the script is already written. I know how it ends...

Out the door for quieter conversation, and a brief walk

"would you like to come

by my place for another drink? It's not far."

Forgetting about perceptions, if just for a night, we

Unbuckle, unbutton, unzip.

Clothes fall or are flung to the floor, just before us... in the

Kitchen in the morning I'll make her favorite breakfast,

not too savory or sweet.

Basic

Megan McClellan

In recess we learn the fundamentals:
Boys together - running, fighting, playing war games;
Girls playing house, loving dolls, cooking and cleaning.

"When a man and a woman love each other,"
The talk always begins the same way
So young to learn it all comes down to sex

The bar is set high: man, woman, love, marriage
Babies, we learn about having, we learn about raising
Why don't they teach us about being?

Why don't they teach us about being
babies? Instead we learn about having, we learn about raising.
The bar is set high - man, woman, love, marriage.

So young to learn it all comes down to sex -
The talk always begins the same way,
"When a man and a woman love each other..."

Girls play house, love dolls, cook and clean;
Boys play together, running, fighting, war games
In recess we learn the fundamentals.



Design #2

Kei Moriya
Merit

Shake Loose What Clings

Joseph Thomas Bullock

If I could detox
the thought of you
sweat your stench
through pores stretched wide open
until all that is left
will eventually drain

If I could make you benign
like a solid mass
stopped dead in its tracks
forever silent
never spreading
only there to remind

Then perhaps I could call
this whole thing a draw
sketch the attempt
met halfway
frame another incomplete
fragment
among the stacks of rough
and not ready

Letting this sentence be riddled
with ellipse
juggling three dots
to be the only constant
contradiction
forgetting whatever came before
or ever since

If I could symbolically recite
every human function
that pertains to release
then maybe I'd believe

that what was wasted
will pass on through
like stones
thrown at stained glass

Because lately
all that has been vivid
is a break-in-case of fire
God of my own invention
Saying simply
don't lose hold
of what you came for
and lord
if I could only listen

What Happened With Amy

Pat Howard

"I don't know where I'm going half the time," the blonde in the Zeta T-shirt said, excusing herself for bumping into him.

"No worries," he said with a grin, checking out her tits before continuing on the maze of brick paths the school had splurged on in an effort to beautify the campus. It must've worked, he noted as he passed a sign announcing that the school had been honored by the city for its landscaping efforts. It always seemed at least a little unfair to Bobby that more of his tuition was spent on packaging the school than on his actual education.

As he reached his favorite bench outside the student center, he slipped a hand in his pocket, closing his fist around a pack of Marlboros, fingers fumbling for the new phone he had laid out for on payday. It wasn't there. "Fuck," he muttered, amazed at his inability to maintain control of his possessions. If Bobby believed in anything, it was that he was cursed to always leave things behind: car keys, lighters, house keys, books, the odd homework assignment, work keys, top-of-the-line headphones last week, and now this brand new phone.

He pulled a lighter and a 100 out of the pack, lighting up and taking a nice, long drag. "Hey, sugar. Do you have the time?" he asked a brunette as she walked past with two friends. She was wearing an old-school Minnie Mouse wristwatch. "It's 10:49," she replied, before turning her attention back to her giggling companions.

Eleven minutes until class, Bobby thought. Mass Comm Theory was not among his favorite courses; it was one of several he didn't usually bother showing up for unless he had to – quizzes, tests, and project days were among the few occasions that could be counted on to compel his attendance.

It had been several days since he'd made an appearance, so today was the day. No turning back; I'm already halfway there, he thought, letting a drag set his lungs on fire, the taste of nicotine coating his throat before leaning over for the requisite coughing fit. He liked to push limits, in little, inconsequential ways – taking a monster drag, flipping off random passersby – as well as in some more significant situations – regularly doing 30 over the speed limit or running afoul of local law enforcement in some other mischievous way.

He dropped the cigarette and ground it out with the toe of his sneaker, leaving a lone butt to mar the otherwise neat walkway. Grabbing his

notebook, he headed in the direction of the Communications Building, passing the student center and crossing a parking lot in his travels. Finally, he reached the back door, pulling it open to reveal a familiar face: blonde, blue-eyed, the look in her eyes somewhere between slightly suppressed fear and the naïve doe-like expression he kept in his mind's eye.

Bobby moved aside, one hand holding the door open. As she realized who was standing in front of her, she picked up the pace. "Hey, Amy," he said with a sheepish grin. She ignored him as she hit the bottom step and set off up the sidewalk, headed south down the street. "Amy!" he called again, letting the door fall from his hand and clearing the steps in two quick bounds to catch up with her.

She heard him behind her and whipped around to face him.

Anger welled up inside him. "So this is how it's going to be now? You ignoring me and going on with your life like nothing ever happened between us?"

"I've asked you to leave me alone, Bobby. In fact, I've asked you now at least a dozen times. I don't know how else to say it." Amy was becoming less and less composed the more she saw Bobby's reaction to her words. "If and when I want to talk to you, I know how to get in touch...." She choked over the last few words, barely getting it out before turning around to walk away.

Bobby looked like someone just ran his heart through a shredder. He fought back tears, letting anger overtake sadness. Anger he could do something with. Bobby climbed back up the steps and punted a garbage can onto the sidewalk below, scattering its contents in the walkway.

Satisfied with his outburst, Bobby reached for his phone before remembering – again – that it was MIA. He peered in the window at the clock on the wall. Two minutes to class but he was too worked up to go today. He walked back down the stairs, carefully avoiding half a roast beef sandwich strewn among the refuse, and made a right, beginning the short walk home.

As Bobby slid the key into the lock, he could hear the TV on in the living room of the apartment. He swung the door open to reveal his roommate, Luke, sprawled on the couch watching a Match Game rerun. Bobby was more intrigued, fascinated, and simultaneously repelled than he cared to admit by the blond boy with the strong jawline he'd had Psych class with freshman year. They'd ended up becoming friends after working together on a few class projects, deciding to share an apartment

a semester ago. He saw something of himself in the guy, like if the circumstances of his own life had been mashed up and rearranged, his life might've turned out like Luke's.

"Rough day?" Luke's dimples showed as he looked up at Bobby with a half-smile of welcome and commiseration. Bobby could (but would never) say these things about Luke: he always kept at least one foot solidly grounded in reality, he was a good listener, and his perceptions of a situation were usually infuriatingly accurate.

"Yeah," he replied, plopping down on the recliner as Gene Rayburn threw to a commercial.

"Hey, don't you have a class right now?" Luke remembered. "Mass Comm Theory?"

Bobby mumbled another one-word answer and fumbled in his pocket for another cigarette. He flicked the lighter and got nothing but sparks as a response. He made a few more attempts, but there was no fluid left in the cheap piece of plastic.

"Damn it!" Bobby said, followed by a half-scream, half-grunt as he whipped the spent lighter into the kitchen. It clattered to a landing before skidding along the linoleum and slipping into the Bermuda Triangle under the apartment's aged refrigerator.

"Whoa, buddy," Luke said, grabbing a spare off the end table next to him, using the light from the TV to check the fluid level before passing it to his pal.

"Thanks." Bobby lit up with no problem, taking in the calm of that first drag.

It was quiet for a moment, except for Gene Rayburn's voice booming from the TV, trying in vain to find a match with Brett Somers or Charles Nelson Reilly. Luke sat up and muted the TV. "What happened?" Luke could've guessed what happened.

Bobby sucked on his cigarette, losing a battle with the tear that rolled down his left cheek. "Amy."

Luke's suspicions were confirmed. The Bobby and Amy Show was seemingly doomed to be in perpetual reruns. "What happened with Amy?"

The hardcore tears were welling up now. Bobby sighed and grasped at composure. "It's just been a crappy day, man."

Luke had little sympathy for most of Bobby's predicaments. His roommate reminded him of people he'd known his whole life who had doomed themselves by their own hand and blamed fate or circumstance. There but for the grace, Luke knew, he could be one of them. It was a fate he hoped to avoid.

"First of all, I can't find my phone," Bobby continued.

"Didn't you just buy that, like, last week?" Luke tried to disguise the judgment in his tone.

"Yeah. So then I was actually going to class, as I do from time to time..."

"Right." The television continued to flash silently as a contestant picked Richard for help in the Super Match round.

"Amy was there. I tried to talk to her, and she balled me out on the street in front of the Comm Building."

Luke was trying, but Bobby wasn't making this easy. "Well, why did you talk to her?"

"What?" It was like he didn't remember anything. He didn't remember why he and Amy had broken up in the first place, the argument they were having and that he'd tried to resolve it by groping her, which was not a successful endeavor. He couldn't say what any given fight had been about before or since. He didn't remember his parents, the way his dad had playfully hassled his mom about her feminism.

He wasn't thinking about the first girl he ever thought was cute, Susie Shepard in the second grade. He wasn't thinking about his first real date, with a girl named Tracy. He'd tried to make himself her boyfriend the next day; it freaked her sixth-grade self right out and she broke up with him before math that afternoon. Tracy was married to someone else before the end of high school. Then there was his high school sweetheart, Krista, but he wasn't thinking about her either – the way her hair radiated sunlight, her contagious laugh, that she slept with his best friend the night before she moved away, never bothering to break up with him or say goodbye.

But Luke was thinking about all of that. Since they'd moved in together, Bobby had done more than his share of opening up after a beer or six, and Luke pieced together the whole traumatic saga in several sittings.

"Why did you talk to her after she asked you not to? You know she needs some space."

Bobby wiped the tear tracks off his face. What he did remember was their confrontation earlier that day: how afraid she'd looked, how stupid he made her feel. It made him mad the more he thought about it. "But why does she have to be such a bitch about it? Why'd she have to make a scene in front of everybody?"

"You have to know that she's afraid of you. Of course she'd want to get attention in case you tried to slap at her vag again or something. And given everything that's happened between the two of you, I can't

say that I blame her. You're not that easy to love, man."

Bobby scoffed. "What would you know about it, faggot?"

Though Bobby might not have noticed Luke's reaction, he couldn't miss what happened next.

"Hey!" Luke was no longer using his indoor voice. In a single motion, he got off the couch, snatched the cigarette from Bobby's fingers and stubbed it out in the ashtray on the coffee table. "You don't get to say that unless you are one, asshole. And let's see...what would I know about it? Well, I recognize that the guys I date are people. I know that they have thoughts, feelings, and desires of their own, that they're autonomous and not bound to my every whim."

Bobby fumbled for something to say and came up with nothing, choosing instead to stammer incoherently. Luke carried on: "People aren't possessions. They're not here for you to play with and hurt and not expect for there to be consequences. Amy does not belong to you. She owes you nothing...no, less than nothing, after what you did. Have you even apologized to her?"

"I can't if she won't talk to me," Bobby protested.

"But you should at least want to on your own, if you're at all serious about patching things up. Whether she wants to keep seeing you or not, you owe her that. But let her come to you. 'Giving her space' is not texting her twice a day and getting mad when she ignores you."

Once again, Bobby knew that Luke had been infuriatingly right. He was in no hurry to accept any of this, and in the meantime, he couldn't resist digging in just a little more. "I'm just worried about her. You know I worry."

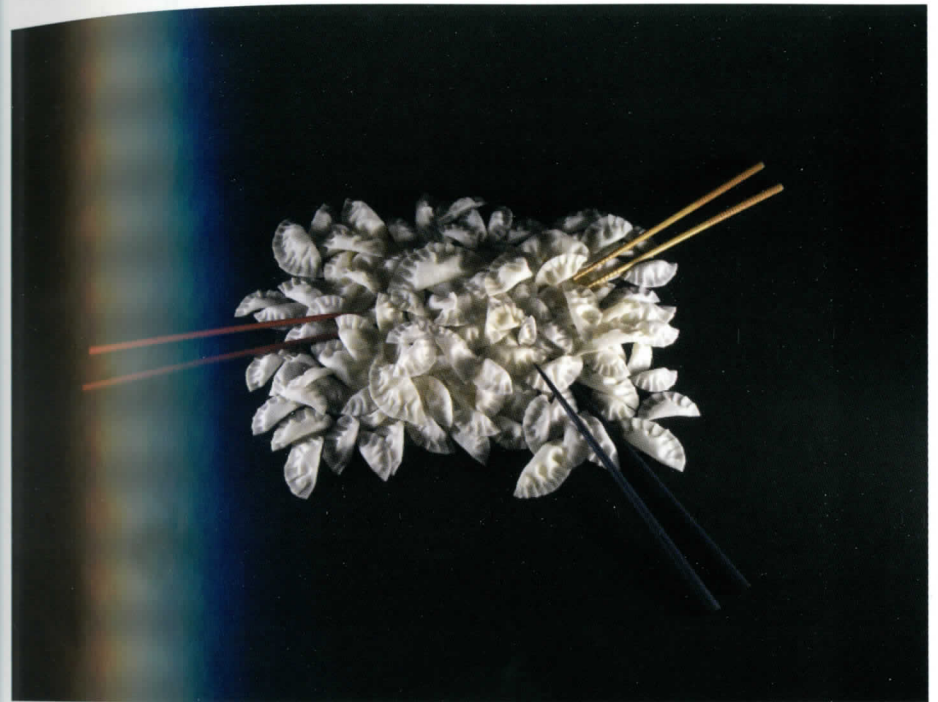
Luke's counterpoint steamrolled Bobby's weak excuse. "Oh, yes. I know you worry. But worrying isn't getting you anywhere, and I'm done listening to you whine about this every day. Make amends, work it out or don't, and move on with your life."

Luke turned the TV off on his way to the kitchen, leaving Bobby to sit in silence. Luke opened the refrigerator, pulling out a head of lettuce, a tomato, mayonnaise and a pack of bacon.

Bobby's reflections were interrupted by a buzzing from beneath him. He traced the source of the repetitive grinding noise to the cushion of the chair, fishing around and pulling out his fancy new phone, exactly where he'd accidentally left it.

It continued to buzz in his hand. He looked at the caller ID display. It said *Amy*.

Bobby swallowed and pressed the red 'Reject' button, letting go of Amy. Bobby smiled to himself and mumbled, "No worries."



Dumplings

Hikari Muraoka
Merit

Song of Isaac

Micah Wood

I continue with the groaning ropes stretching on my back.
Close to my father I travel in the morning light.
Sound sleeping suddenly woke to fierce eyes
that anxiously searched the face of this son.
Those balls of glass puddled and spilled water
down bearded cheeks. They would not soon be dry.

The consistent, beating sun squelches my tongue dry.
Refreshing moisture creeps up the well, but we can't go back.
Pails drop down within that water,
making young arms strain, for full pails aren't light.
We can't go back. He calls out, "Son."
I run beside, but am not met by his eyes.

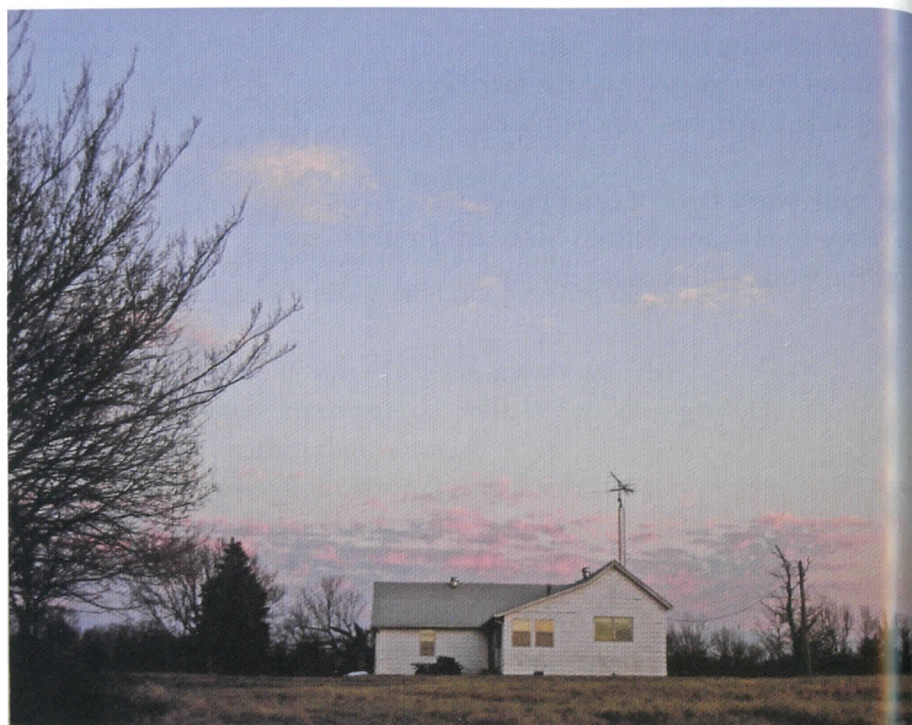
A glossy resolve glosses his resolved eyes.
The mountain rises to that dry
sky. A fire, a knife meant for this son
who hoists the wood planted on his back.
Dirt and dust rise to haze the light.
Traveling feet kick the road far from water.

Ascending the steeping earth, the body yearns for water
to refresh the aching limbs. Heat waves over the eyes
to deceive: oceans cascade down rocks in a strange light.
I fight to recall why we've come, why the dry,
rocky lands have been embraced. Why this back
has served as soil—I am a son.

Reaching the altar, I roll off the load of a son.
The camels run searching for water.
Kneeling in the dirt, I see my father's old hunched back,
and his turning resolve augments the blade in my eyes.
Unrestrained tears refuse to keep his cheeks dry
as he lays my head to face heaven's light.

The lifted blade glares in the light.
My father obeys as a son to slay his son.
Since the valley is so dry,
may my spewing blood be water
that flows unrestrained like the tearful eyes
of my father with his hunched back.

That salty sweet taste of dripping water
descends to my mouth from his beard from his eyes.
And the wood still rests on my back.



Red Sky at Night

Craig Hurst
Merit

People of the Seed

Micah Wood
Best Fiction Award

Daniel quickened his pace because the heat rushed into his skin despite the two potholders. His wet hands may have contributed to the poor insulation. After washing the day's work from the creases in his hands, he didn't have time to use the hand towel hanging to his left. On his right his wife shrielled, "Grab it, grab it, grab it, grab it," as the potholders did not save her tender hands. He alleviated her pain, and he began his own.

Lunging forward, Daniel placed the scalding pan on a third potholder resting on the center of the dining table. Six chairs surrounded the table, though Daniel and Suzy Cooper only had one child—two if you count the little one daily expanding within Suzy's womb. Just below the 40-watt bulbs fixed in the low hanging chandelier, Daniel watched the swirl of steam rising from the baked beans. He grinned as his mind recalled the singsong rhymes his grandfather had sung about the magical power of beans to create potent farts. Daniel grinned not only for the humor of the rhymes, but also for the simplicity of their truth. Beans make people fart. Period. The gas he'd been experiencing that week could dismantle anyone's disbelief in his grandfather's words.

"Thank you, honey," Suzy said while bringing three glasses full of ice to the table. "Clarissa, come to the table." Daniel heard their daughter's previously reclined feet hit the ground as she stood to click the television off. "Did you wash your hands?" Her mother's question met her at the dining room door. To answer, Clarissa simply lifted her hands and displayed her palms to show that washing was not needed. "The germs are invisible. Go wash."

"Alright."

Daniel wiped his hands on the seat of his pants to dry the parts the two potholders failed to absorb. He helped his wife set the glasses in order as she commented, "So Ike is spending a few days out at the cabin?"

"I suppose."

"This is the third time in a row you've left him out there on his own." Daniel continued to set the table in order.

Once they had all settled in their chairs, Suzy eyed her husband, signaling to bless the meal. The family reached for each other's

hands, and Daniel led out: "God is great." Then his wife and daughter joined: "God is good. Let us thank Him for our food. By His hands we all are fed. Give us now our daily bread. Amen." Releasing hands, they lifted their utensils and began to eat.

Daniel returned from the store just after the sun had reached its highest point in the sky. The summer air clung to every ray cascading down from the heavens, not wanting to let go. Rather than risking a heat stroke while operating his machinery in the fields, Daniel pressed through the heat and light to a small circular grove of pecan trees just left of his house. He walked until their strong, sure branches stretched around him, providing shade and rest for his senses. During a good year, those branches would be weighted with hundreds of pounds of pecans. That year, however, the branches could rest their rigid limbs and merely sustain the lightness of leaves blowing in the dry wind.

After Daniel had sat and leaned against the tree's rough bark, a soft thud dropped to his right. "Hey, Daddy," Clarissa greeted. He hadn't seen her in the limbs above him. Now that she had jumped from a lower branch, she approached her father and reclined next to him. "So, Daddy, I've got some questions." Her young body rested flat while her face contorted to reveal the curiosity rolling in her head. "Why don't these trees dry up and die like the corn stalks did?"

His daughter's question was simple and honest. It came from a purely curious mind. But Daniel's heart weighed just a little heavier at her asking. His eyes lifted from her face to peer across the brittle golden stalks choking up from his fields. Beyond them he saw the green of the small soy plants beginning to yield to the infectious brown as well.

"Roots."

"Huh?" Curiosity contorted her face still more.

"Roots," Daniel repeated as if no further explanation of the word were needed. His daughter's blank stare prodded him on. "Deep below us there is water resting in the dirt. These pecan trees have underground branches called roots that reach downward and drink up the water. Even when it don't rain, they still can find the water."

"Why don't the corn stalks do that?"

"They don't have the strength to push their roots deep enough."

After a few moments of pondering, Clarissa finally responded, "Momma tells me to pray at night for rain. I'll start praying for the corn stalks to get stronger." Satisfied with her conclusion, she relaxed the

curiosity and lifted herself to scale the nearest tree. Daniel noticed bits of twig hanging from her blonde strands.

He rested a bit longer before returning to the dusty fields.

He stood before the sink once more to prepare for the evening meal. The cold water warmed a twinge when his dry, dirty hand turned the left knob a few degrees. After lathering and rinsing, Daniel seized the hand towel still hanging to his left. His wife passed hurriedly behind him carrying a scalding pan of baked beans between the two new potholders he had picked up at the store. "Thank you, Lord, for potholders," she declared under her breath. Daniel did not recall such thanksgiving being bestowed upon him.

That evening the table was already set, and Suzy and Clarissa were positioned in their chairs when Daniel entered the dining room. He had lingered in the fields that day leaving himself no time to help prepare the table. After the noise of his tractor had silenced, Daniel had turned toward the rows of crops rather than toward the nestled white cottage filled with the aroma of a busy stove. He'd walked between the reaching, thirsty vegetation. The broken earth had crunched beneath the soles of his boots.

Walking in that twilight, memories clouded Daniel's mind of the times he had wept for heaven's rain as he did now. Above the gentle hum of various insects, his mind's ear heard the nagging cough that seized his grandfather just before he died. Each hacking attempt to dislodge the sickness from his lungs mocked young Daniel's bowed, praying head. Moments after a strange machine with strange green, rising mountains sounded a piercing, unbroken pitch, his mother had looked at him and said, "Remember, Daniel, remember the peace your granddaddy died in. Heaven's real, Daniel." Daniel did remember.

Daniel had also remembered the early twilight hue that he'd snuck out in to take the ACT. The grueling standardized test awaited him at the community college thirty minutes from his family's farm. He did not keep the test secret from his parents because he feared their disapproval. He kept it secret because disappointment is easier to swallow when you don't have to announce to an expectant audience. He protected his father and mother from his desire to further his education and sought scholarships to carry him forward. Daniel remembered the pitifully low test score printed coldly on a light pink slip of paper.

Other memories continued to rush at Daniel, but one image

overpowered his mind. He saw before him his daughter kneeled before her bed. He heard her ask God for rain, and then he heard her ask Daddy why the pecan trees had not died as well.

These thoughts had kept him lingering under those clear skies.

Now, he was standing before his daughter and wife. They waited for him to seat himself, grip their hands, and lead out the prayer. Clarissa rested her head on her right hand. Suzy finished distributing each of them their portion. Daniel moved his body to the head of the table and sat. In a very long, awkward moment Daniel considered his options. He glanced from daughter to wife to plate. Daughter and wife stared at him, wanting his hands and prayers to initiate dinner. The food before him steamed silently. He lifted his hands from his thighs, extended them toward the table, and picked up his fork and knife.

"Daddy, you forgot to pray!" Clarissa protested as Daniel chewed the beans and slid them down his throat. His wife's mouth hung slightly open. "Daddy!" His daughter complained with annoyance because of her parents' lack of response.

"Why don't you lead us, dear," Suzy directed her daughter.

"No," Daniel said during his second bite, but was not heard because of the bolus creeping down his throat.

"God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food—"

"No!" With clarity Daniel projected his interruption. The outburst halted his wife and daughter's words. Startled, opened eyes faced him. "From now on, we will only say things that are true in this house. Beans make you fart, but God does not feed this family."

He scooped another forkful into his mouth and began to chew.

Daniel swung alone on the front porch while pots and pans clanged within the house. The naked bulb above him drew moths and other winged insects to congregate in a fluttering community. They appeared from out of the thick cloud of night that had descended upon Daniel's house when the sun had finally taken its hours to rest. The porch light made the darkness impenetrable to the eyes. No streetlight or neighboring house shallowed the depth of the black around Daniel.

In his mind's eye he replayed again and again his daughter's startled jerk when he forbid her prayer. Guilt did not plague his mind, nor did sorrow that would lead him to repentance. With each replay, a stronger emotion developed within Daniel: resolve. Staring into the darkness, he was resolved. Staring into his daughter's frightened eyes and his wife's

questioning face, he was resolved. He refused to pray for a fictional rescue. He swore at the heavens.

In the distance Daniel saw the darkness cowering before two approaching headlights. The night parted just enough to let the moving lights pass, then quickly rushed back into place. Had it been daylight, Daniel would've seen the cloud of dust chasing the white pickup truck's rear tires. But it wasn't daylight. Daniel didn't see the chasing cloud, or the pickup's white paint being frosted with dust. Yet, he knew who rolled down his drive.

Daniel continued to gaze ahead as Ike Rivers exited his truck, stretched his calves, and eventually climbed the porch's steps. Without waiting for the right rhythm of the swing, Ike sat, causing the suspended bench to sporadically shake and wobble. Daniel felt Ike's firm hand give a comforting squeeze to his thigh.

"It's going to rain, Dan." Ike smelt of earth and wood. He smelled of the must of a wall heater generating fumes. He smelt of his old hunting cabin. Ike had been fasting. Ike had been praying.

"Don't think," Daniel began still gazing into the darkness, "that starving yourself for a few days will bring to life a god that we've created in our minds."

Ike stopped the slight swing they had resumed once he'd sat. Daniel felt his friend's eyes searching his face, observing his grave stare. "It is going to rain, Dan. Roll up your truck's windows and prepare your fields because its coming."

"Get off my porch."

The swing wobbled a little when Daniel stood up and walked to the edge of the porch. His back faced his seated friend. He heard Ike rise and take a few steps across the concrete. Ike repeated himself once more. "Dan, it going to rain. And it's going to rain right now."

The first thing Daniel experienced was the smell. The sweet incense of clouds drawing close to thirsty ground dominated the thick night air. Next, his ears caught the sound of water splattering upon his tin roof. The heavens mercifully yielded drop after drop after drop. Luscious rain fell. Heavy rain fell. Chubby water dropped from the clouded skies. Daniel and Ike stood silent. They stood motionless. Then, Daniel spoke. "Get off my porch."

Turning, Daniel gripped his screen door's handle and let himself into the house. It banged shut, and in the corner of his mouth Daniel tasted the bittersweet salt of tears.



Untitled

Lynn Moore
2nd place 3D

Pompeian

Zachary Aaron

Part I: "Death-cast"

A brilliant bracelet catches my eye
among the oxidized exhibit pieces
and I press my face to the case—
hazing the glass to read its inscription:
'DOMNUS ANCILLAE SUAE,'
'from the master to his slave-girl.'

A plaque tells me that the jewelry
was found near the body of a woman,
whose 'death-cast' is also in
the Pompeii collection.

I see her
on her stomach,
rough and pallid plaster
diving into oblivion—
she has no face,
only a void
unsculpted.

Part II: Rudimentum vivo -- attempts to live

An unsettling silence
blanketed the countryside
and the Mediterranean breeze
was motionless when the trees
and stones began trembling.
The mountain exploded
hiding the daylight
by a blistering surge
expelled into heaven—
the grayness fell
through artificial night
gathering on gardens
and bronze Gods.

Children twirled in the
forged snow, then choked,
and tears stained their faces
dark.

Panic filled the smudged air
as those finding protection
among their familiar frescoes
were trapped by failing facades
and splintered wood—bones.

The slender avenues bloated with
desperation
and echoed, “Meus deus! Servo nos!”

The stones of the Via Della Marina
became littered with plastered faces—
mute gasps blind eyes
and rudimentum vivo.

A stir in the silence
heaving—
she pulled the muslin
of her dress over her face
to ease the growing fullness
in her throat and the gold armband
branded
“DOMNUS ANCILLAE SUAE”
into her olive skin
as she surrendered to the centuries.



Kaguya-hime (The Bamboo Cutter)

Hiroko Kanazawa

1st place time-based multimedia

"S" As In Sandra

Samira Shaikh

There is nothing special about my name except that there is. Yes, I am aware of what I just said; yes, I know the statement is self-contradictory, and yes, I am in fact sober.

My name is not particularly distinct, especially in my country, India. Most did not even bat an eyelid when I said it aloud. The only resentment I encountered was from those who unfortunately belonged to that class of people whose fingers have been long-stained from filling out uninspiring paperwork in an equally uninspiring government office. You see, I have a long name, not too long, just long enough to annoy some who have to tediously scrawl it out more than once on official papers for some official purpose. These few got back at me by filling out any relevant information in the least legible scrawl. The finished paper bore an uncanny resemblance – and I swear by the long Dead Sea scrolls – to an ancient script belonging to a race that perhaps dipped chicken feet in some crude ink and ran them all over a parchment. Nevertheless, I always appreciated the fact that they chose to express their discontent in such a subtle manner.

Thus far, I hope I have succeeded at getting the idea across that my name, for all practical purposes, is in fact no small inconvenience. And for any of those Doubting Thomases who might still be tempted to quote Shakespeare, let me give another example of how my name has made a few people's day a little less bright, a little less hopeful and for yet others, it has raised serious questions about life, the universe and stuff. This happened a long time ago when I was too young to understand the complexities and the subsequent problems springing from my name. It happened in fourth grade, when my teacher on the very first day of class made the pupils go through the time-tested trial of "getting to know" the 45 other kids in the class. We took turns standing up and saying our names for the class and then proceeding to spell them out for the teacher. When it was my turn, I took a deep breath and said, "Samira Shaikh Mohammed," my name. Now, it could be that I have articulation problems or it could be that a lack of sufficient particles in the space between her and me made it difficult for the sound waves to travel, but whatever it was, she made me repeat it

at least four times, and then she asked me to approach her desk. I was asked to repeat it again, slowly this time as she tried to write it down. She had problems with the "Hasham" part. After several attempts in front of an animated class, who found her attempts at pronunciation comic, she decided to save face by condemning my name as belonging to that group of countless others which have neither reason nor rhyme. If I had then the sense of courtesy that countless years of education have now equipped me with, I would have said, "I duly apologize for the inconvenience caused by my name ma'am: my frantic cries at birth and in the days that followed did little to discourage my parents from naming me thus." But being nine and lacking a sense of decorum, I stared at my feet and listened as my teacher made a case of her dissatisfaction with my name.

No, my name has no ominous message or hidden dark meaning behind it. It lacks any evil onomapoetic resemblance to any person living or dead, like say Bin Laden. This name is laden with so much terror that a simple search on the Web of the same could put you on the NSA's list of "Top Ten People From Among the Tens of Hundreds of Others Who Might Have Close or Fairly Close or Even Not Too Close but Close Enough to Rouse Our Suspicion and Fill In Our Quota For Today's Al-Qaeda Suspects" list. My name means *story-teller*: very apt if I say so myself.

As years passed, I became aware of the international presence my name had. My recent air flight from India to the U.S. made me acutely aware of this fact. The airport attendants were careful to greet me in a manner reserved for the very few having distinct names such as mine. The attendant politely asked me to step aside for a closer check. "You have been randomly picked for this check, ma'am," the lady officer said as she carefully combed through my carry-on baggage after searching me. She sounded deceptively similar to the lady who calls you up at home to announce that from a draw of totally random names, yours has won a jackpot and a 12-month free subscription to *Good Housekeeping* magazine. I might have ignored this "random" check as a random check had it not become a recurring pattern at every airport. An intelligent design behind these "random checks" soon began to emerge. You see I have a "Mohammed" in my name which raises red flags in most western countries since many extremist terrorists, whom the West has come to dread, have this name in common. Now "Mohammed" is a very common name in Islam, the prophet being born under the same

name. However, because of recent terrorist activities by a small group of fanatics, the whole community is viewed as a community of potential suicide bombers. If they took the trouble of asking, I would let them know that I prefer a peaceful death without the company and the noise. I don't much care for flamboyancy. And I definitely don't care for the 72 promised virgins since I don't swing that way, and the kingdom of heaven has no alternate arrangements for us women.

The really lucky ones got it right with short uncomplicated names, Mary Poppins for example. They don't have to complicate any written procedures by spelling out three generations worth in names like I have to do with mine: Hasham being my dad's name, Mohammed being my Granddad's, Shaikh being the family name and, Samira being me. I once seriously considered changing my name to only Samira Shaikh but then I thought better. Ever since I found the winning formula, I find it much easier to spell out my name to others; I now dictate 25 names to spell out the four words in my own: 'S' as in Sandra, 'A' as in Amanda, 'M' as in Mike, 'T' as in Ingrid...

No Place

Pat Howard

Hello there, how are you. I was driving
by here and I saw the sign.
The last place I lived didn't have
a sign in front of it. That should've been

a sign itself, I guess. But that's not what
I'm calling you about. Well, sort of, it is.
I'm looking for an apartment - two bedrooms,
preferably, something in the higher end

of the starving student price range.
What's the rent? What's the deposit?
Are utilities included? Can I bring my
satellite dish along? Please say yes;

I'm stuck in a two-year contract with
an exorbitant termination penalty.
By Christmas, maybe we'll both have
something to celebrate. I get a new place

to live, and you get a check every month.
The landlord-tenant situation is a keen
illustration of what my biology professor calls
a symbiotic relationship. (the love of) Money

may be the root of all evil, but it pays the bills.
You like income. I like a roof over my head.
There's nothing better than money in the bank,
and there's certainly no place like homeless.



Backseat Love

Jacob Jones

1st place digital still image

Context

Kali Mobley

Best Nonfiction Award

I'm sitting on a loud, yellow school bus next to my friends, who are a year older than me. Our crazed bus driver bangs a large stick against the yellow metal as if it was going to work and control us to silence—it does for the most part. The stiff brown-leathered seats could only fit two people comfortably, but my seat held three. I'm squished in the middle with no room to move, no room to escape. To my right, my friend Natalie sits. She's a skinny brunette who loves to smoke and flip her large bangs under so that they'd be perfectly rounded to the top of her eyebrows. To my left, my friend Julie sits, and she's very different from Natalie. Julie has long blonde hair that looks like it's never been brushed. She's athletic, and like me, she comes from a military background.

These two girls are my best friends even though they are in the sixth grade, and I'm only in the fifth. Our little group isn't the nicest group on the bus, but I try to be nice, especially to Martha who is the girl that everyone makes fun of and laughs at. I feel sorry for her but can't show it. As I sit on the school bus, Julie and Natalie start making fun of Martha, but Martha truly believes that they're her best friends. I remain squished and silent.

My silence doesn't go unnoticed because the joking turns on me. I'm the "goody-goody," "teacher's pet," and "overachiever"—all names I'm used to hearing. I remain silent and avert my eyes to the window, but that doesn't stop the name-calling, even Martha's saying the names; the need to be accepted is a chain effect. I give a giggle and try to change the subject.

"Have you ever said a curse word?" Natalie asks.

I shake my head as my two friends agree loudly that I AM a goody-goody, but on this particular day, they wanted to change all of that for me. They start chanting loudly for me to cuss. When that doesn't work, then they start taunting me.

"C'mon, just say it. It won't hurt you, and your mom won't find out. Just say it—say it," says Julie.

I take in a deep breath, a final look out the window, and say "damn" very low. The girls start laughing like hyenas and want me to say it again.

I do: "Damn."

Once I say the curse word again, I don't feel the same; I'm a new person, not the old me—I'm a person who is no longer "clean." It was the first time that I was ever coerced into demoralizing myself with one simple word—"damn."

Later at home, I develop this urge to say the word again as if I joined a secret society of curse-word speakers and that one word was the password. My mother is in the kitchen cooking supper for my sister and me while we do our homework. My head is swirling with my friends' chanting, taunting urges for me to curse again, and I do: "Damn." My mother's supersonic hearing picks up the despicable word, and she asks me to repeat the word to make sure she'd heard everything correctly the first time. I look at her with shame and guilt, but I won't come clean. I blatantly lie to my mother. It's a chain effect.

Later, at age thirteen, I will learn how to create a grammatical sentence using a curse word for almost every part of speech. The words are a game to me with no meaning, just the thrill. I feel grown and invincible, but most of all, angry at the word. I'm still controlled by these curse words because it's a part of the cursing chain effect.

Later still, in college, I will learn that curse words are only blank words with terrible meanings put behind them. I will believe that I'm clever with this notion and will spread my philosophy. I will start saying, "F'n" or "GD" as a way to prove that it's the tone and context, not necessarily the words. My mind and personal philosophies are centered, no controlled, by this logic. It's the chain effect.

And later even still, I'll learn that the curse words are only excuses and failed attempts to show emotions. The curse words are empty, and I will break into the control tower to take over the remote to my mouth and logic. I will learn how to express myself with "grown-up words." I will try to be clean, at least for my children's sake because that's what adults do. I will learn that self-control will be more important than establishing my ignorant philosophies. But when all words fail, I will be able to look beyond the taunting urge.

But on this day and on this school bus, with jeering taunts and the need to be accepted, I'm controlled by the moment and forced to say the word. I can't look beyond Natalie to see out the window. My eyes stop short; my mouth opens for the cursing chain effect. "Damn": innocence; "Fuck": emotions; "Shit": mistakes; "God Damn": people.



Design #3

Kei Moriya
1st place 2D

Peut Être

Kali Mobley

My bed is hungry like a hippo.
Its soft teeth yearn to devour me.
I can feel the cold sheets lick my skin
as feathered pillows fly toward my face
while my black dog protectively barks
because he smells my rotten morning fears.
I scream, but my mouth is silenced by feathers.
My dog chomps viciously on my ankle
trying to save me with his putrid breath.
Prince is his name from Doggy Kingdom,
who isn't my Prince Charming,
but my morning's menace.
"Gimme...Gimme...(MORE)" blares.
More, I want, but not from those speakers,
the home of idolized "fake" culture—I mean pop,
Like the sound of my childhood whoopin's.
I was smacked when I was good
because "It ain't gonna git better than this,"
my mother yelled with morning whoopin's,
the ironic savior of laziness and sleepiness,
the bed's sneaky accomplices.
My head, floating in the ground,
was softly being smothered by this villain,
who released me into the fiery depths,
liquefying me into the present moment.
The blinking blinds screamed, "Nails shall not bail!"
The Kali I know scoffed the warning,
which will lead to daily torture
lasting from this moment to her death.
The cool sun would not concede.
I'll force him to lose by making him win.
Peut être, mon lit m'adore.
My bed hugs, not attacks;
it wants me to stay wrapped and warm—
free from the black pesky pest
and hidden from the day's blazin' glory.

A Musing

Joseph Thomas Bullock

She cries
her voice is soft
and sweet
the texture of warm velvet blankets
wrapping you like a mummy
back in sixth grade
when you were out of school
with the flu
for a whole week

Your world was smaller then
Gatorade popsicles and reruns of sitcoms
broadcast across the bent antenna
of a television screen
laced with static

But even those years ago
told you
never let yourself be claimed
which you willfully obeyed
evidenced by pledges you read
for the sake of appeasing those
who watched your lips move
if they only knew
or for that matter
even listened
perhaps a pelican pouch
filled with maybes
could have kept the consequences
from becoming reasons for your defenses
but you held your head up high to exclaim
that scar tissue
is most distinct
than the smoothness of skin
unscathed
and you chose
to roll with it
Like an avalanche

that never looks back
 you swore that nothing
 could stand in your way

She cries your name
 it's faint
 barely audible
 but something in the acoustics
 hauntingly reminds you
 of a reoccurring dream
 the already seen
 a deja vu that dissipates
 before you could catch your breath
 and digest
 vanishing upon the brink

And you would love nothing more
 than for this apparition
 to fade into a forgotten crevice
 of grey matter
 in your cerebral cortex
 erasing itself
 from the muddy banks of your memories
 never again to be recalled
 no recollection of that moment
 when synapses fired
 like Fourth of July
 no mnemonic device
 to breathe life
 into the template
 of once remembered

And oh how you prayed
 for the grace
 that her calling
 would quiet its indelible whisper
 and leave you be

But she's not inclined
 to let you off that easy
 and a gentle breeze
 set to the key

of calliope organs
 reaffirms your faith
 that nothing in this space
 between birth
 and demise
 ever comes without a tug
 upon the string of your fate

So you chose
 to grab hold of it
 like a golden rope of hallelujah
 spiral-staircase tied
 'round the only truth
 you've ever known
 there is no escape
 from the vice like grip
 of this muse
 and she pulls you through
 with cries of your name

This is the third time
 her siren song's been sung
 resounding in the cowardice
 roaring through the bravery
 and ignoring the unmistakable chorus of her refrain
 is a fallacy
 you can't afford to entertain

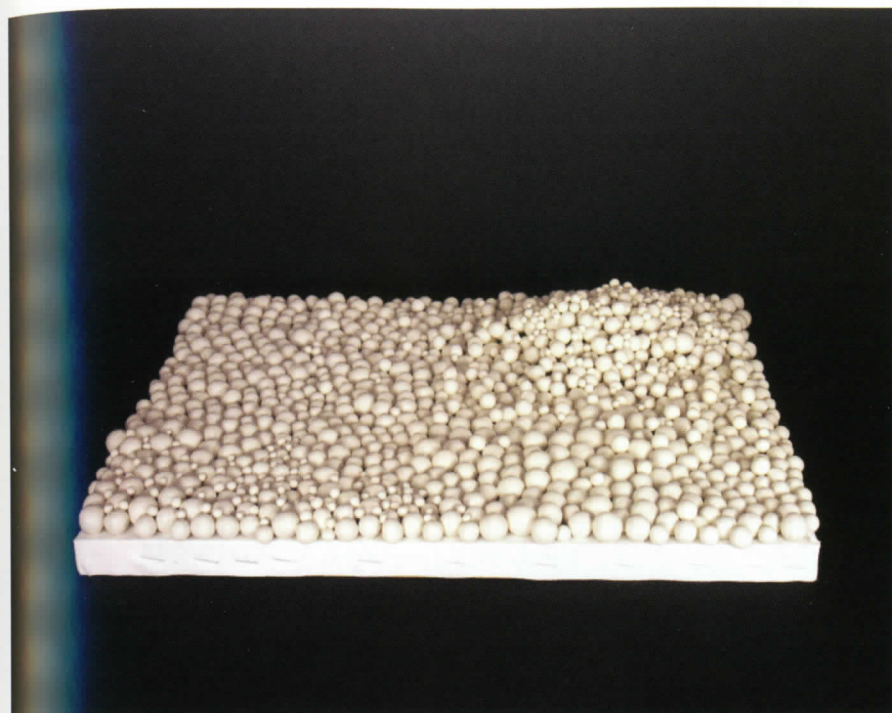
So instead of fighting battles
 long lost before fought
 you decide it best
 to disarm every breath
 extending an olive branch
 through the gaps in your teeth
 like a rose to the tango
 of you and she

And in mid curtsy's bow
 of this forbidden dance
 you fall to your knees
 surrendering
 sweetly

The Dance

Crystal Dill

The touch of satin that lingers
on your skin as it moves slowly
down a curve of flesh designed to
entice the senses and enchant
the body to move and relent
to push and release. Desire
burns and senses vibrate. The night
is our orchestra and the stars,
our enraptured audience, watch
with celestial envy as our bodies
sink into the delicious bond
that only appears when two
people merge and become partners
in a sensuous dance of give
and take. We were made to move with
each other. The stage is set for
indulgence. So take my hand and
release the past. Dance with me.



Wall

Hikari Muraoka
1st place 3D

Point

Megan McClellan

when
i was a
child her
voice was
a needle -
sharp, piercing,
piecing it all
together. now
it's a whirl, whitenoise,
the soothing, mechanical hum
of the sewing machine, tuned out for
its persistence. i don't mean to; it's just
become habit. she patched all my wounds,
stitching over the pain of a sensitive child's
traumatic childhood until it all just bled into that gentle hum
throbbing, forgotten.
when i left home, she made me an afghan
crocheted by hand of a hundred squares - all different patterns.
a blanket so full of intricately patterned holes shouldn't
be so warm, but it is. it's warm and heavy and when i pull it over my
head it muffles
everything - drowns everything in a downy density until i am left with
nothing but my own thoughts
and the gentle hum that the rest is reduced to.
and this silence is some days
the only thing i can retreat to
that comforts me, that holds
me warm and safe in its heavy
folds. it pierces
my heart
to know
that in
the end,
she is
still
what
pieces it
together,
needle
sharp



Untitled

Masaki Sasaki

2nd place digital still image

The Secret Page

Kali Mobley

In his mother's closet, Peter, his father William, and his mother Lacey, are going through old scrapbooks from various ballroom dancing competitions and looking at gaudy costumes cluttered with diamonds, sequins, laces, ribbons, and beads, which were designed with Roy G. Biv in mind.

Lacey looks at the old photographs and gowns with awe and nostalgia, while William reminisces about the beautiful woman who used to wear the enchanting gowns. Peter finds a beautiful ballroom gown that was used for the Waltz. The gown was made with soft lavender silks lined with white feathers and embroidered with tiny diamonds around the deep V neckline. Peter's dark eyes lighten at the sight of the gown, and his breathing halts for a few seconds.

"Look at this gown, Mom."

Lacey looks at the gown her son is holding and smiles. She stands up from her king-sized bed, walks toward Peter, and takes the lavender silk gown.

"This gown...ah! I remember the first time I saw this gown; it was hanging from Mrs. O'Mara's dress shop window. This dress told me that I was going to be a beautiful ballroom dancer, and when I put the dress on, it made me feel like one."

"Sure, Lace," William laughs. "Peter, don't listen to your mother. That gown didn't tell her anything. I told her—like I do everyday!"

Lacey objects to her husband's absurd accusations, but Peter isn't listening to the light banter between his parents for he gazes at the gown's design in his mother's hands. Peter had grown to be a very clean-cut, lanky twenty-year-old with black hair and eyes to match. Unlike most twenty-year-olds, Peter has an undying obsession with ballroom gowns.

Peter's mother and father believe that Lacey's ballroom dancing career created the obsession. She was an extremely talented ballroom dancer, and she taught Peter from a very early age about the competition. William and Lacey love the combination of the strict regulations of dancing and the rhythmic flow of the music; they are ballroom traditionalists. Lacey retired from the ballroom dancing realm when Peter was fifteen, and she went out on top. Peter, however, knew that Lacey's career wasn't the reason for his obsession.

As Peter continues to stare at the gown's long and intricate design, he remembers his very first time attending a ballroom dancing competition.

On a visit to the annual ballroom competition in Dulles, Virginia, with his mother and father when he is ten years old, Peter finds himself pushing through a large, chaotic crowd of flamboyant dresses with ruffles or sequins and stylish penguin suits topped with top hats. His father is in front of him, some other men and women behind—it's a wonder how people are attracted to these competitions, fighting their way through deep valleys and vast mountains of winding Virginia roads—until at last they push through a thick velvet, red curtain, which opens to a cleared area with dressing tables and tall mirrors surrounded by bright, burning bulbs. The men and women, who were either putting on too much make-up, covering their teeth with globs of Vaseline, or checking their costumes, had just cleared out of the area to prepare for their dancing debut, and only a few remaining contestants remained behind preparing and waiting for the professional part of the competition.

"What a woman," his father tells him, and another man wearing black and gold says that there is no other to match her beauty.

"It's the effect of the angle where we are standing," a woman scorns.

"There's where a true, beautiful creation of God is sitting in the midst of her frivolous skirts and dangling jewels," Peter's father says, paying no attention to them. "There you are, my dear boy"—he turns to Peter—"and God grant the day that you'll find a woman with beauty to match your mother's, and if I live, I will see it, too."

Peter has an idea that there's something wrong with what his father is saying, but he isn't acquainted with his body to know that he won't be interested in dating women. Or maybe his mind is playing a trick on him.

Peter's eager gaze remains transfixed on his mother's lavender gown as he reminisces until Lacey breaks it by taking the dress and hanging it back in her closet with the rest of her costumes. Peter stands planted in the middle of the tan room, which is stapled with golden frames containing cats and various potted plants, as if he continued to gawk at the gown. Then, his father's boisterous voice breaks his trance.

"So, Peter-boy, did you decide on a partner for the ballroom dancing contest in Alexandria? You only have two months."

"Ugh, no...no, I don't know. Sorry, Dad."

"Well, you'll need to find someone soon. You can't compete by yourself, you know."

Peter does know this, but he has a secret and isn't prepared to release it. William shakes his head at Peter and walks away with Lacey by his

side. After they leave the room, Peter runs to the closet and swings open the doors. There it hangs—the lavender silk gown.

Peter rips it off the hanger and sneaks it out of his mother's room. The dark hallway hides his eagerness, and the old, wooden floors creak with his anticipation to get to his room, which is four doors down from his parents' room. He can hear their loving whispers above his own creaking footsteps.

Peter arrives to his room and rushes in, but doesn't slam the door—he closes it with ease. 'This gown will be the answer to everything. I think I'm ready,' Peter thinks to himself.

"Peter...Peee-ter!" William yells for his son from the bottom of the oak stairs. "Hey, Peter, will you please come down here. Your mother and I've found you a partner."

Peter stores the gown under his bed in one of his crimson bed sheets. He hears his father calling from downstairs, and he knows that he better answer before his father becomes suspicious. Peter sticks his head out from his oak door and yells back, "I'm coming... hold your horses..."

Peter leaves his room and gives a longing glance back at his door, but continues toward his father's summoning. Peter reaches the bottom of the oak steps and meets his father's exuberant smile and beaming eyes. Peter knows that this isn't going to be good, but there isn't anything that he can do—the time is not right.

"So, Dad, you've found me a partner for the competition, huh?"

"Yes, Peter-my-boy," William exclaims, "I've got you a keeper. Her name's Samantha, and she's a looker! I think she might be your Lacey."

Lacey stirs from her rose leather sofa, while voicing a light chuckle to her husband's loving hopes for their son, and retorts, "William, leave him alone. He's still young, and people don't get married this young these days. Let him just have fun at the competition. If there's no fun, then he won't dance, and I'll see to that."

"Well, the boy can at least meet the girl, Lace," snaps William.

"Th-thanks, Mom. Umm... I was waiting to tell you both this, but I've already found a partner. I just didn't want you to inspect our style of dancing. I want it to be a surprise. Is that O.K.?" Peter lies, because he had to intervene; he can't dance with Samantha. That is out of the question. Peter looks at his parents to see their reaction to what he had just told them, and they were struck with either dumbness or awe, because neither his father nor his mother said anything to him.

Peter turns to walk away from his parents, but he doesn't go far before

his father responds, "Peter-boy, if that's your wish, fine. You know we're here to support you, right? I'll call Samantha and cancel."

Peter is in shock by his father's response, but glad, too. Maybe he'll understand.

The weeks of preparing for the competition are coming to an end. Peter had been dancing with his mystery partner every night for the past three weeks, and he's ready for tomorrow's competition in Alexandria, Virginia.

"Peter, are we going to get to meet Ms. Mystery tonight or tomorrow before the competition? We want to meet her, you know," his mother inquires.

"Well, Mom, I think you'll meet her tomorrow after we dance. You know how nervous I get, and we want to win. So, no distractions... O.K.?"

"Alright, Peter, your father and I'll wait. Are you ready to go?"

"Yeah, let me go grab my stuff."

Peter runs up to his room, grabs his crimson sheet from under his bed, and buries it in the bottom of his suitcase. For the past three weeks, Peter had been looking at his mother's old ballroom gown with growing intensity. He knows that the gown will bring him luck for tomorrow's competition. 'We're going to win tomorrow, and my parents will learn the truth. They need to know,' Peter thinks to himself as he runs back downstairs to his parents' car.

The car ride to the competition is slow and dull. William and Lacey attempt to retrieve information from their secretive son, but their attempts fail. Peter sits next to the window looking out over the curvaceous lands of the Appalachian Mountains. Unfortunately for Peter, his parents didn't stop their idle interrogation about Samantha and his new partner.

"I'm glad you went on that date with Samantha," William says with a sly smile and a wink to Peter through the rearview mirror.

Peter continues to stare aimlessly out his window and rolls his eyes with each remark his dad says about Samantha, the would-be partner. Peter's parents are satisfied enough about Peter's secret partner, but they keep pushing for him to be with Samantha. Two days ago, Peter finally gave into his parents' persisting requests and took Samantha out on a date. Peter, still looking out his window, remembers the awkward encounter with her.

"She's definitely pretty with that long blonde hair and round silver eyes," Peter recalls to himself, but he shrugs the memory off when his

mom asks, "Well, will there be another date, Peter?"

"Umm... Mom—Dad, I doubt there'll be another date. It went pretty bad."

Peter's parents don't stop with that acute explanation and push for a better, more acceptable one. Finally, Peter gives into his parents, again, and tells them the about the tragedy.

"FINE—I'll tell you guys whatever you want to hear so you can let me concentrate for the competition tomorrow. I picked her up on time. She was wearing this beautiful chocolate dress that was outlined in aqua satin, a beautiful dress because it matched her eyes. She smiled, and we got into the car to go to dinner. The entire time we just sat there staring at each other. Actually, I had a better conversation with the waiter, he recognized me from high school."

"Oh really, who was it?" interrupted Lacey.

"Adam—Adam Nolan, you know, he was the Valedictorian. But anyways, Samantha was nice, and we both share a love for dancing but that's it. There's nothing there. Period."

"C'mon, Peter," William cajoles, "You know that we just want you to be happy and find someone. You're young, and you should be dating around and figuring out what you like or don't like."

"Well, I can tell you what I don't like, and her name's Samantha," Peter huffs and slams his head back against his headrest, his face red and eyes rolling.

Peter broods in the backseat for the rest of the trip remembering how horrible that conversation about Samantha was and how close he was to coming clean to his parents. The entire subject made him nervous, and he wasn't ready to confront it. Like his parents, he isn't the confrontational type—competitive, definitely, but not confrontational.

After two hours of driving and the intense interrogation, William, Lacey, and Peter arrive to the Renaissance Hotel, the location of the ballroom competition. There are vibrant colors of orange, purple, blue, canary yellow, and other vivid eye-catching colors sewn with feathers or jewels. Women are wearing their clown faces, and men are running around with their numbers flapping in their wakes. This entire scene reminds Peter of the first competition he saw—the first competition that told him he was going to be a spectacular ballroom dancer.

"Well, alright, I guess we need to go check-in and practice for tomorrow. You ready, Peter?" William asks.

"Hmmm? Oh, yeah... yeah, I'm ready."

William, Lacey, and Peter check into their rooms, and then, Peter runs off to practice with his mystery partner. They need the practice; they need to be perfect for tomorrow.

After several hours of practicing, Peter returns to his parents' room. They ask him questions and tell him not to fret, but he knows tomorrow is a big day, not because of the competition but because the secret will be unveiled. After two hours of game planning with his parents, Peter retires to his bedroom with uneasy anticipation about tomorrow.

William and Lacey find a round table covered with white linen close to the floor. The juvenile and the senior competition have already been concluded, and the young adult competition is beginning. While Peter's parents take their seats, couple by couple is announced. Peter's couple number is 168, and he's third from last to be announced.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, Couple 168—Robert Fallen and Page Anderson."

The crowd applauds, except for two people—William and Lacey. They are confused; they heard the correct number, but they didn't see Peter on the dance floor.

William inquires, "Where is he? Do you see him?"

Lacey looks and stares at Couple 168. They walk closer and closer to where she sits at the round table next to the dance floor. She looks at Page Anderson, and everything becomes fuzzy. Anderson is Lacey's last name, but a lot of people share that last name. Then, Lacey looks at Page's gown for the Waltz and notices the fabric. The dress is made with a lavender silk lined with white feathers and encrusted with jewels around the deep V neckline—that gown is Lacey's old ballroom gown.

Lacey gasps, "It couldn't be. No, it couldn't be."

William barely hears her, and he doesn't understand her whitened, wide-eyed expression. He looks around and his gaze falls on the couple next to their table—Couple 168.

"Are you serious?" William shouts.

Peter sees the shock on his mother's face and is disappointed by her reaction, but then, he hears his father's reaction. Peter, or Page, wants his family to accept the real Peter—the Peter, who loves gowns, dancing, and wants to be a woman, not date one.

The music commences, and no one else recognizes that Page is a man, except for his partner, Robert Fallen, Page's secret lover. Page is at least accepted by one person, but what will his parents say when they're done. Random, awkward questions pop in-and-out Peter's

head while he dances, but they don't interfere with his natural skill in the art of ballroom dancing—he was born with it pumping into his veins. Although he was raised a ballroom dancing traditionalist, he still respects the craft with every swift, sharp movement with a lady-like grace. Peter doesn't see why his gender should affect how and when he competes because his heart and soul belongs to it.

The music stops, and the dancers give either a bow or curtsy. The judges give a brief thanks and dismissal. Then, the couples rush off stage to either their families or to prepare for the Latin portion of the competition. Couple 168 only dance the Waltz, because Page can't wear one of those skimpy ballroom gowns with mid-drifts or thigh-high slits that are common to the Latin portions of the competition.

Page approaches William and Lacey, who are still dumbfounded by their son's secret with Robert next to her for comfort, support, and courage.

"Hello, Mom ... Dad. I'm Page." Peter declares to his parents and gives a light curtsy.

William and Lacey don't know what to say, and Page's cheeks flare under all of the pageant make-up as she gives her father a huge grin.

"Dad, I know you once told me that you wanted me to find someone beautiful like Mom, and I have. I looked in the mirror while wearing this gown, and I saw what you saw in Mom."

William can't look at his son—his daughter—whoever that person is wearing Lacey's lavender ballroom gown. With disgust and disappointment, William turns away from his only child. He remembers the little boy following him in his footsteps at ballroom competitions; the days they played basketball in their driveway, or the time when he gave his teenage son "The Talk." William trembles at the mere thought of those times—all those pointless, useless times. Lacey looks at her son with a blank stare. She doesn't know what to do; she loves the person in front of her—male or female. And she knows that her husband can't see the person; this is a serious issue to handle, especially for a man with a large ego like William.

Page reaches for her mother's hand, but Lacey is frozen until her hand is sharply grasped and yanked away from Page's reach. William snorts with disgust and storms away from Page. Dumbfounded and hurt, Page watches her parents, who have their heads down with shame, walk toward the neon red light blaring "Exit."

The Pugilist

Hayley Sylvester

fight me
bare knuckle
knock down
drag out

come on

hurt me
lash out
pummel away
don't stop

I taunt

hit me
punch harder
feel nothing
want pain

need more

bleeding out feels great

hit you
eat floor
get up
fight back

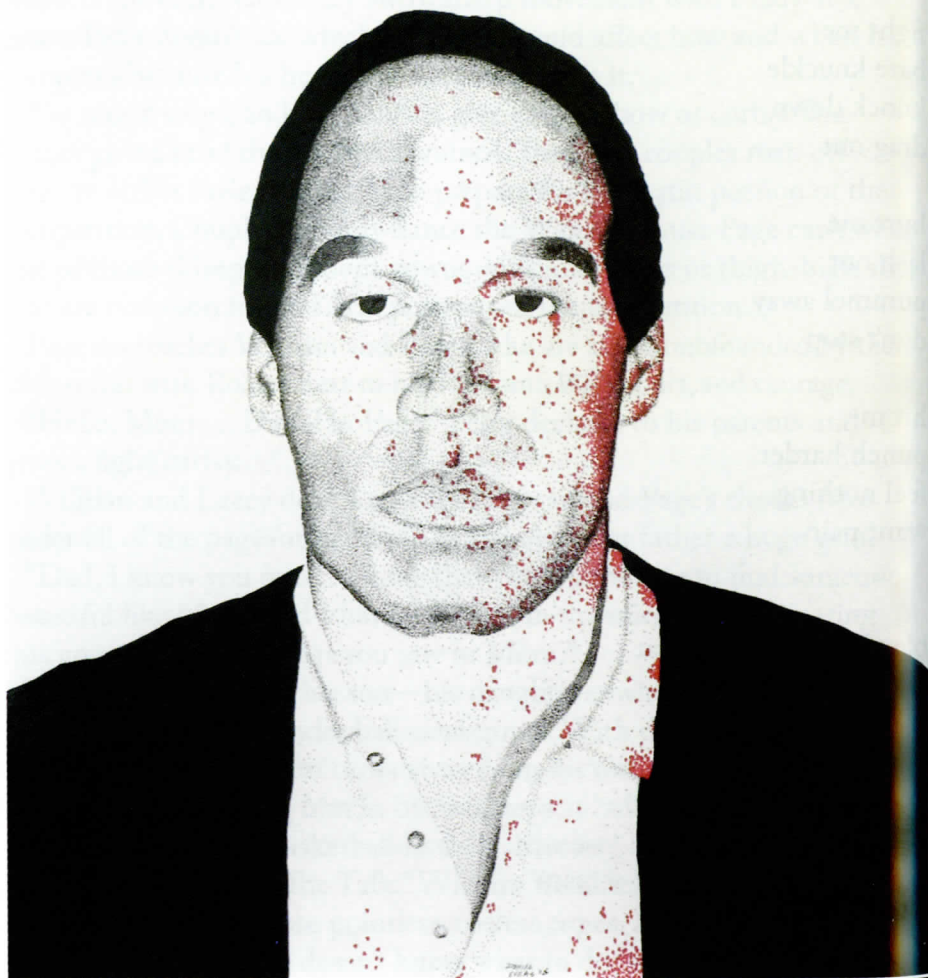
I scream

hurt you
no remorse
end this
one winner

it's over

fight you
sucker punch
below belt
beyond caring

man down



OJ Did It

Daniel Evers
Merit

Fly Away, Fly Away

Matthew Mallard

His name is Tyler L_____, and he is married to my sister. I do not like him, not even remotely. Tyler's hair is the color of burnt brownies that stink up the kitchen for a week. He is fat and demeaning and is not afraid to ball his fingers into a fist every now and then.

The "love of his life" is a slim, fair-skinned, strawberry-blonde woman with an intelligent mind and an open heart. But she cannot sing very well. She sits in church on Sunday morning, hymnal open to number 341, thinking she is singing alto. *I'll fly away, oh glory, I'll fly away, in the morning. When I die, Hallelujah by and by, I'll fly away, fly away.*

We go fishing, my sister and I, and she wears long sleeves in August. She sits beside me in the boat and watches the sun reflecting low in the water. She never meets my gaze. I finally ask her point-blank to find out why she hides her arms. Yes, she confesses. It's my husband. He beats me.

I drop her off that evening at my house, so she can spend the night with her sister-in-law and play babysitter to her redheaded niece and nephew. I drive to her house, the house she shares with that sorry excuse for a man. I take the rifle out of my truck bed storage box. I know well enough what I'm doing. It's self-defense, I'll tell the police if they ever find the body. But I know they'll never find the body.

Next morning I return my shovel to the shed and my smoking gun to its place in the study. I take a shower in an attempt to wash the dirt and blood from my conscience. I know it's futile, but I'll have to live with it. At least I'm still alive. And my sister, as she attempts to hum the right notes of the chorus of number 342.

Three-Tiered

Matthew Mallard

The sky is a striking sapphire, sadly too strong
for the setting. The sun stands low on the horizon
and pulls up a seat to witness our assembly.

A jeep pulls up; the passenger door opens.
We hear desperate, inconsolable sobs, enough to crush
our hearts like used tissues clinched in fists. We glance

at our shoes, at the sun—anywhere but at the young mother,
or her comforting husband. We follow the newlyweds
to where the tiny coffin sits, resembling a three-tiered cake.

Hardly before the family can receive us, a bulldozer
grumbles, forcing the red dirt back into its hole.
Flowers are flung on the new mound of earth—
white and yellow roses and baby blue carnations.



Untitled

Cale Frederick
Merit

Normal

Megan McClellan

Her lies fall flatter than pancakes.
She says "I love him more than life itself."
The coffee pot begs her to smash it, preferably
Across his overripe face –
Swollen, red, with the reek of fermentation,
Of alcohol.
"You done did the thing, girl," says the man who washes dishes,
And she did do the thing; she tells us all she did.
But her eye is as black as the deafening silence
That falls when she walks away.
She radiates a burning
Red calmness that makes Meggo wonder if he has
A cool blue rage, a matching mixed-up set.
She will end him, or he her.
But today the tea is sweet and the bread is warm
And the repetitive nature of work is a comfort.
Gary Tistern is in Richmond, Virginia,
And he is not thinking of her, as she is not thinking
Of him as she calls back to expo for six flat on the fly.
Because she makes him
Drink by not being good
Enough. They know
She couldn't survive without him, or he without her.
That's all there is to think of that, and she's already thought it.
Vso normino, a Russian friend taught her. Vso normino.
Everything is normal.
She pours three teas and takes a basket of bread to her table
Keeping her dark eye turned from them.



Dictator

Daniel Evers
Campus Bookstore Award

The Bible

Sabrina Balch

Part 1: the beginning

As a teenager
my father was a hooligan-
at sixteen his brand-new mustang
was his status symbol.

A jock who proudly wore his colors,
his focus on his vices.

If only for a minute
missing teeth and a sewn-up head
brought him closer to reality
after sliding across dirty pavement.

When he was two years old
he somersaulted down
a flight of stairs

and bounced back
just as quickly.

My mother epitomizes all that is good.
This is a lifelong trait of hers.

A perfect mother is no
easy act to follow.

When she was in high school
she tutored small children,
scored the winning basket,
led the newest cheer from the top of the pyramid,
cooked dinner for a shut-in elderly woman,
studied for her chem exam,

and taught a Sunday school lesson, all
in less than seventy-two hours.

I did most of those things. Once.

She would have never associated
with hooligans
like my father.

Except maybe to pray for his soul.

When I was four years old
I picked up after my father.
Empty beer cans and ashes and cigarette butts.

I remember pulling into the driveway
after a night at church with mom,
hearing *Third Rate Romance*
through the closed windows of our Buick.

Forty-five people gathered on the driveway
for an impromptu shindig
of southern goodness.

Rock on .38 Special and the Allman Brothers.

When I was twelve, my father abandoned
his guitar for a bible his mother gave him
on his sixteenth birthday.

Black cover and crisp pages
looked good as new,
a contrast from the long-tailed mustang.
He said he needed to set a good example
for my little brothers.

He did.
But they don't know who the Marshall Tucker Band is.

Part II: ripples

I've been told that I take after my aunt.
My mom's younger sister, she was
the rebellious one.

She was the girl
who sharpened her nails to a point
before she played a basketball game.

It's only a foul if the ref calls it.

She moved out of my grandparent's home
the day she turned eighteen--
moved to Auburn,
took up the classic college life.

She fell in love with a football player
and he asked her to marry him,
but she turned him down, saying:
*I'm from the deep south
and my family would kill me
if I brought home a man like you.*

She could have been
Mrs. Bo Jackson.

My older brother and I
used to play legos in secret
when we were supposed to be
reading scripture.

LBT
Lego Block Time

We would write it on our hands,
sign it with our fingers,
or sneak a note.
There were villages

and back stories.
And themes. We would have town
or pirates or medieval.
But they couldn't be mixed together --

that wouldn't be historical.

Not like Black Beard
with his peg leg
and pointy hat
or the little mustache and sideburns
drawn on with a fine-tip sharpie.

My mother once asked my father:
Don't you think you're being too strict?

I think a pig flew by.

For part of my punishment, I had to read
an entire book of the bible
from my dad's copy.

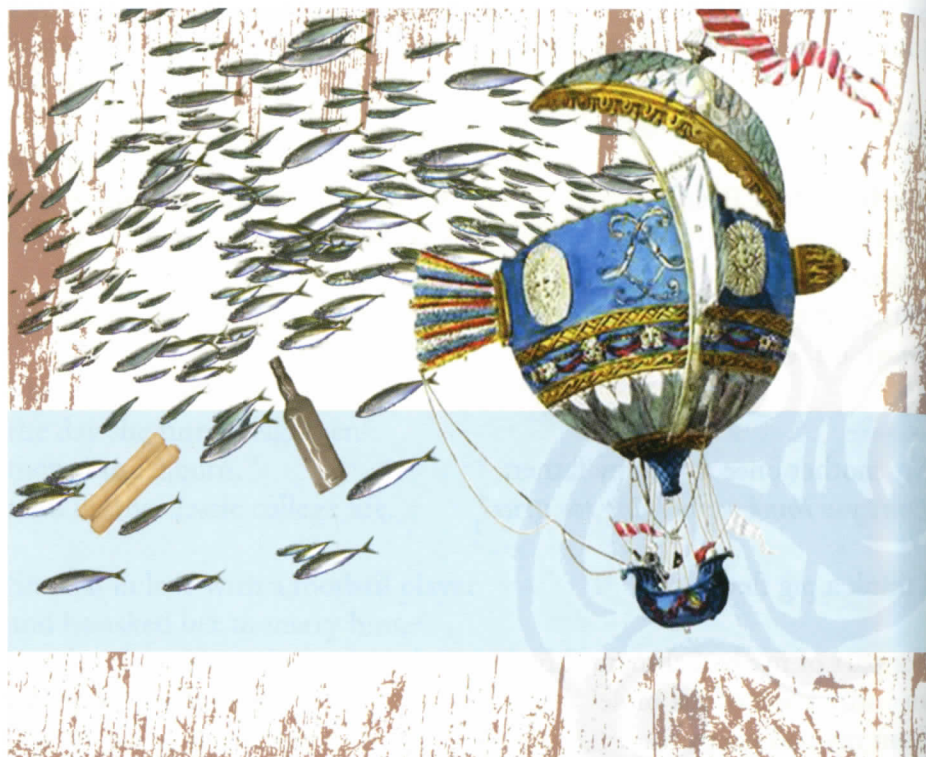
I chose Third John.

When I came out of my room
five minutes later
he didn't understand.

He never liked when I knew more
about his religion than he did.
My mother taught me well --
too well, apparently.

So he made me read Acts.
Aloud.
He was proud of that.

Like the time he punished me
by forbidding me to read.



The Balloon Hoax

Hanna Oliver

2nd place time-based multimedia still

Candling

Trey Bagwell

Henry Carroll was the younger of two sons. He lived and worked his entire life on the hills of Mayfield. He caught his first fish in the pond where his great-nephew now farms. He learned to drive on the dirt roads, which now houses the little suburb. He had his first taste of alcohol and women where the school now stands. He and his brother Ivan, along with other young farmers, needed something soft and smooth to touch after scraping their hands against the tools and fields. The curtain of pines hid his desire of cards, liquor, and lust. This combination equaled a six-month pregnant bride named Nancy. Henry was twenty.

"We gonna be right from now on," she had said that cold December wedding day, "No more running around. We got a baby comin'."

That meant no more hiding in the woods for Henry. He stayed on the chicken farm that he inherited. Chickens were not popular then. Eggs, of course, were good, but chicken as meat wasn't. People saw chickens as absolutely disgusting when they saw them on a farm. It was the hardest and worst livestock business to get into.

Henry spent many hours a day in the chicken plant. He and a handful of workers would inspect and handle each egg everyday. They had thousands chickens, but most of the work was done the old fashion way: Candling. Holding the pure white eggs, they would put a candle behind it and look for any dark blemishes. The smallest imperfection meant the egg was no good and had to be tossed to the side. This went on everyday for years.

The home was not much different. When he was married, he thought Nancy would take the place of the "rough" life. She did, but it was not for the better. Her eyes were always on him and always wondering. She kissed him and hugged him when he brought in the money. She gave the look of judgment when he didn't bring any.

"I'm tired of living this way, Henry," she said one night. The farm was not doing well this year. On many nights, she was yelling at him, but tonight she was eerily calm. He turned down the T.V. to listen to her.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"We were young, you know. We were just young and naïve. I'm not saying I regret our children. I don't. But, maybe it's over."

"Why do you say that?"

She was silent for moment then she said it.

"I think you could do better. I think you can be better, because I don't know if you're good enough for me."

Henry was shocked. Anger burned inside of him. The frustration was running all through him. "Not good enough?"

"You still drink and the preacher was talkin' and he said drinkin' is a sin," she managed to get out.

"I've stopped drinkin'," he said firmly.

"No, you haven't."

"You gave me a limit, and I only drink that limit."

"You could do better. All way around, you could do better."

They remained quiet. She gave him that judging look. He felt like he disgusted her. She got up from the table and went to bed.

For the next few weeks, he would come in and eat dinner in silence. Not many words passed between them. He thought she would mention divorce, but she never did. He figured it was on account of religion. She was strict on going to church every Sunday and Wednesday and any other day the church doors were open.

After sometime, Henry decided to break the silence. He was going to change for her. He swallowed his pride and said, "I'm sorry. I know I can be a better person. You know, I'm thinking of getting another job and I've stopped drinkin'. I guess you haven't noticed."

He felt that this would make her happy. It didn't.

"You don't get it," she said.

"What?" he asked frustratingly.

"It's not just the money or the drinking, Henry. It's the embarrassment at church. You rarely come and when you do..." she trailed off.

"What?"

She didn't say anything. She just gave him a stare of pity and shame. He couldn't take it and went back to the woods. He started going every Friday night to the shed his friend Sykes built. They had set up a few tables while Sykes sold his moonshine. He would lie to Nancy every Friday night.

"Liquor in the front, poker in the back," Sykes would say through his yellow grin.

Henry's brother Ivan was a regular. Ivan would even bring his son Richard in. Richard was twenty years old, just ten years younger than Henry.

"She keeps a tight leash on ya, don't she?" Ivan said one night

shuffling the cards.

"What's wrong, Uncle Henry? You ain't wearin' the pants?" Richard added.

"She's just an old bitch. If she holds the leash, why am I over here with you fine gentlemen and she's over at the house?" Henry questioned.

"Cause you lie to her. Don't you? A new story every week." Ivan said coldly. The others laughed.

"You see, Henry here has been given a limit by the Missus," Ivan continued. "He only gets one teensy little bottle a week. The rest he hides in that old piece of shit tractor. He's always finding a reason to get on it."

"Is that why you always offering to help, Henry?" Richard asked, cackling.

Henry nodded his head smiling, shamefully.

After that night, he confessed to Nancy where he had been. She called him a liar and a no-good husband. She told him she could never trust him again.

Henry said, "I feel like I got no pride."

"You sure don't! Drinking, gambling, and God knows what else while lying to me!" she accused.

"You wouldn't let me go if I asked you."

"You're right I wouldn't!"

"How can I be a man with you treatin' me like a boy?"

"Because you are!"

From that night, Nancy questioned every act he did. Whenever he stepped out of the house, he was asked where he was going or what he was going to do. The lies piled up with the bottles of whiskey. Soon, Henry stopped caring about himself, his wife, and the farm. He was tired of candling the eggs. He didn't want to search for miniscule blights anymore. A glance was all that was given to them. The business suffered for it.

A year later, he drove down to his nephew Richard's house. Richard had two boys. They were playing out in the yard that day. They concocted a basketball goal from some materials in Richard's shed. Henry embarrassingly drugged his way across the yard to Richard's shed. Richard had done well with his farm.

"Uncle Henry, what do you need?" he asked.

"Well, to get right to the point, Rick, I ain't doing so hot. My hens are laying bad eggs or something, and I can't sell them worth shit," Henry said.

"How much?"

The question stung Henry's chest with the pain rising up his throat. It wasn't the question itself but the tone of it. It held no surprise, annoyance,

or disappointment. Richard sounded as if this were a regular routine.

Henry lowered his head and murmured, "\$10,000."

"I figured you were in the hole but not that much."

"I've been careless," Henry admitted.

Richard gave him the money. Henry could feel the shame rising, and his pride shrinking.

The money helped, for a while, but it slipped through his fingers. It slipped through like the rest of the borrowed money into other dirty farmers' hands, empty bottles, and women.

When Sykes was caught making and selling moonshine, Henry had no place to go. He found himself most days on a tractor in a barren field. Drinking alone, he would look at the ditch on the side of the road. A careless man could easily miss the ditch and be pinned between the ground and tractor. Sometimes, when all that was left in the bottle was backwash, he'd wish he were careless.

Henry was at his breaking point. He felt everything slipping away. One night, at church, he broke down and rededicated. The annual Baptist revival had grabbed a hold of him with Nancy grabbing the other side. He rarely touched the drink after that and had quit gambling all together.

"I straightened him out," Nancy would say proudly.

"She sure did," he would say defeated.

Two years after borrowing the revival, a slick black pickup truck rolled down the gravel driveway. A gray suited man with a briefcase came walking up the steps to the door.

"Who is it, Henry?" Nancy asked, sounding more like an accusation than a question.

"I don't know," Henry said. He knew, however, that it must be someone from the bank or government. The bills barely made it out the envelopes much less to the mailbox.

Henry opened the door before the gentleman could knock.

"Oh, Mr. Carroll?" the man asked.

"Yes," Henry whispered.

"I'm Jack Nate," he said offering his hand.

Henry reluctantly shook it and asked, "What do you need Mr. Nate?"

"Please, call me Jack. May I come in? I've got some interesting news for you."

Nancy allowed him. Henry motioned him in a general direction to sit. The furniture and the coffee table were all close to each other in the tight quarters.

A moment of silence filled the air. It lasted only a second, maybe

minute, but to Henry it felt like an eternity.

"Mr. Carroll, I'm a representative from Valleydale Farms. Do you realize that most people have given up their chicken farms? In fact, in the state of Alabama, there are only a few farms left?"

"No, I didn't."

Jack Nate seemed excited, but Henry was still worried. He didn't know where this was going.

"Well," the man said, "You seem to own some other chicken plants in other parts of the state, right?"

"Yes, sir."

Henry did manage to purchase a couple of small ones with the borrowed money, but he had purchased them to have an excuse to get out of Mayfield, not to make a profit.

"Mr. Carroll, the need for chicken as a meat product has grown significantly. The supply doesn't reach the demand. Now, we at Valleydale Farms already know you know this. We know that if you went out on your own, you could make a killing."

Henry had no idea, but he tried to stay calm.

"Go on," he said.

"So, we at Valleydale Farms are willing to make you an offer to buy all the plants and land with it."

"How much?"

The man pulled out a one-page typed document. Henry glanced over it for a moment. The dollar sign, the numbers behind it, and the line for his signature stood out the most. Henry had never imagine this much money before. He was on the verge of tears. He quietly handed the paper to Nancy. Henry was about to speak when Nancy started to cry.

"We gonna be right from now on," Nancy had stated that day.

Henry paid off his debt, bought a house for his daughter and son-in-law, and sent his grandchildren to private school. Nancy asked for a mansion with an enormous yard. She wanted it to look like Tara from "Gone with the Wind." The house and land were better than Tara with a high fence surrounding the property and an electronic gate at the entrance.

Though the community had somewhat grown (a new school and ball field were built), the town of Mayfield was mostly empty fields and woods, and the Antebellum-style mansion was out of place. The house had several dozen rooms, seven bathrooms, and a man-made creek going down the center of it.

Of course, Henry was usually not there to enjoy it. The first few years after selling the farm he went to Africa and Alaska to hunt, the Caribbean

several times, and even toured Europe. Nancy would sometimes join him.

When he settled back down at his home, he often would stand on the balcony and look at the chicken plant, which was only a few hundred yards away. A warehouse was built beside it with the company logo embedded on one side. The red and yellow logo was already fading. He could sometimes hear the animals. Most times he couldn't.

After a few weeks, Henry went over to the warehouse. After all this time, he hadn't been there since he sold it. As he walked in, the old smells and sounds came back to him, except this time it was four times stronger. The warehouse probably held over five thousand chickens. The lines of cages seem to go on forever.

He saw one of his old workers in the corner. Henry hadn't seen him in years. He updated Henry on all that had happened. He gave Henry a tour of the facility and showed them all the new machinery.

"You work harder than before?" Henry asked.

"Well, I say it's different. Some things got easier; some harder. You'd like it here. We don't have to do no more candling."

"Really?" Henry asked.

"No, sir. New machines do it for you. They just move the eggs down an assembly and it makes the egg look better. No more squinted eyes or being careful. You just have to sit and look like you're watchin' the T.V."

Henry wanted to get back to work and explore. But he was out of it and wouldn't know where to start. He went back home, sat with a beer, and watched the football game.

"What is this?" Nancy came in holding two empty whiskey bottles.

"Empty whiskey bottles," Henry said barely glancing away from the television.

"You know the rules, Henry. Only one bottle a week. I found these two in the trashcan, and we just had it emptied two days ago."

The finances had increased, but the liquor quota was still the same. The next day, Henry dropped a hint saying that he wanted to get the old tractor workin' again. A few days later, he got it out and started helping his nephew Richard every now and then. He bought and hid two bottles a week in the compartment. Before every week was up, he found ways to "help" his nephew. He found himself more on the tractor than at home. After a while, Richard didn't need his help anymore, and Henry was running out of excuses to leave. Often times, he found himself back in the barren field with a bottle in hand.

"That's it, Henry," Nancy finally said one Thursday morning.

"I know where the hell you've been going. I'm tired of telling you."

"I'm a grown ass man. Let me be," Henry said, annoyed.

"You're completely tainted. I should just throw you out."

"Then do it!"

He knew she wouldn't divorce him. She still held tight to her church. Every Sunday and Wednesday she would make sure he saw her leaving. She always asked if he was coming, and he would always tell her he was busy.

He could see she was beyond frustrated that Henry had lost that Christian spirit. She was embarrassed having to go to the church without him. He knew she probably was tired making excuses at church for him. He knew she was tired of his excuses. She was ashamed of him and herself. It had gotten to the point that some nights she would stay over at the kids' house.

"Henry, Richard called and says he needs your tractor," she said one day coming into his side of the mansion.

Henry felt horrible. He hadn't had a drink all morning.

"What's he need it for?" Henry asked.

"I don't know. He says it's for the field next to our old house."

"Okay."

Nancy looked him up and down. She shook her head in disgust.

"You're no good."

"And you're so pure? Damn, woman. You come in here, in my house no less, and tell me I'm no good. Nancy, I'm fifty-six years old. My life is half-over. So for God's sake, would you shut the hell up and leave me in peace?"

"I never loved you."

"That's your problem."

He got up and put his overalls on. After all these years, he finally said what he wanted. He finally chose to do what he wanted. "Now, I'm going to go help Richard, I'm going to get drunk, and I'll probably play some cards."

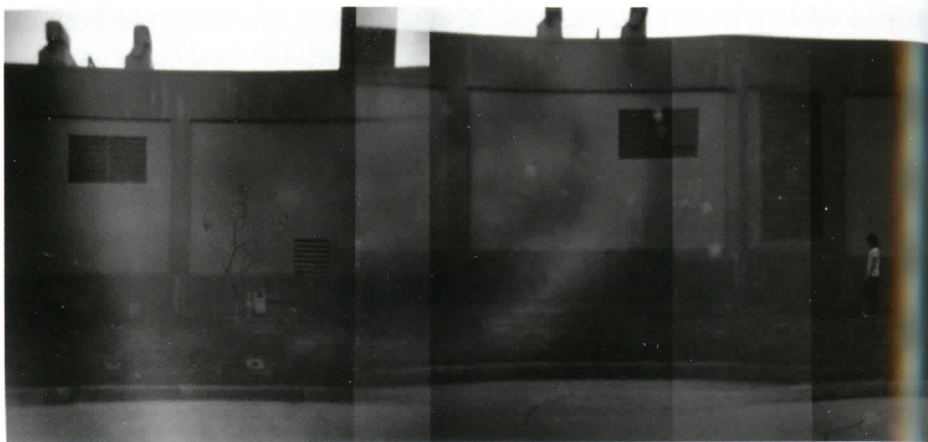
"And then whore around?"

He smiled, "Only if I'm lucky."

Later, Richard found Henry's tractor in the ditch next to the field. Henry was pinned under it. Richard called Nancy as soon as possible. After he told her the news, Nancy finally spoke. "Did you find a liquor bottle anywhere near him?"

Richard sighed, "I halfway expected that. So, I checked to make sure. All I found were two unopened bottles smashed in the compartment."

"Thank you, Richard," Nancy said coldly and hung up the phone.



Photography #2

Kei Moriya
Merit

The Switch

Kellie Seal

When I was younger, I was pitching a fit –
some kind of tantrum – while visiting Grandad's house.
Without a word, he got a branch, a switch,
from a tree.

He looked at me with his steel gray eyes, kind eyes
with wrinkles from years of laughter
and concern.

He said to hush up – fit-pitching wasn't allowed in his home.
I'd never seen him mad.

He hung the switch on two nails in the garage,
a reminder that fit-pitching was not allowed.



3 For the Price Of 2

Iria Emerson
Merit

Fingerprint Foundations

Sandy Morris

This weekend I am visiting my grandmother for the first time this year. We live only thirty minutes apart, but just like her twenty-four other grandchildren, I am too busy with my own life. Somewhere in between work and school, I have forgotten that she is waiting for visitors that rarely come.

While pulling into the driveway, I notice my grandfather's car. It was probably the first new car that he'd ever owned. It was his freedom from my grandmother's nagging, paid for by the government in return for a war he claimed he couldn't remember. At age eighty-six and almost blind, his freedom was taken away by the lady at the courthouse who refused to renew his license. He was only able to drive his new car for two weeks. He died a few months later. It sits underneath dust now.

My grandmother won't drive the car. She doesn't crave independence. She's never hugged curves, never driven far, far away because she's sad and no one understands. She's never driven at all. She only sits and looks out the washroom window, waiting for more cars to fill the driveway—cars with no dust.

She meets me at the back porch. Our visiting ritual has begun. One by one she points to her twenty potted plants, feeling it's important that I know her reasoning in choosing each plant. "This one has red petals, and I love the color red. This one looked right puny, so I felt a little sorry for 'im." She refuses to buy perennials. My father makes the annual trip with her to the greenhouse, only because she can't drive. Every year he hopes she decides to give perennials a try.

I walk toward the familiar smell of the blue hydrangea bushes. I'd found countless Easter eggs in their shade during my childhood. We don't have get-togethers anymore. We all grew up, moved away, forgot where we came from. The picnic table my grandfather made from scrap-wood rots away between the bushes. He'd never thought to stain it.

My grandmother's sons don't mow the yard as often as they should. I pull weeds growing by the side of the porch's brick foundation, revealing my favorite part of the house. The hands of my grandfather, grandmother, and all nine children were pressed against wet cement that someone had carelessly spilled onto the ground when the house was being built. My grandfather's handprint is in cement connected to the foundation. If you look closely, you can see the swirls of his fingerprints. Near the handprint of my Uncle Wade is the date May 1962.

"Christy, it's too hot out here. Come inside, and I'll git you a Little Debbie cake and a coke."

Visits with my grandmother aren't the same since my grandfather passed away. She calls me Christy most of the time. I'm not sure what she calls my cousin Christy. She doesn't tell me anymore that a girl needs a husband more than a college education. She's forgotten to meet me at the door to tell me she can't believe that I drive all by myself. I miss her more when I'm with her.

She thinks her Alzheimer's medication is blood pressure pills. She doesn't know that she's slowly being taken away from us.

I follow her in and watch her fill two Styrofoam cups with ice. I try to refrain from thinking of how much she's probably hurt the environment with eighty-seven years of doing things like drinking from Styrofoam cups. Her hair has a blue tint to it and her tight curls make me think of Chia pets. She is wearing her favorite blue sweatshirt--the one with patriotic cats.

She opens cabinets overflowing with Little Debbie snack cakes until she finds my favorite, the zebra cake. She turns around and hands me the cake and a cup of grape soda. I forgot. Every carbonated beverage is a coke to her. I hate grape soda.

I follow her into the living room and we sit on her floral couch. She keeps our ritual going by telling me which cousins have gotten pregnant before they've finished school and which uncles are still not handling their divorces well. She's trying to remember something else she had wanted to tell me, when she leans against the back of the couch and dozes off.

I try to be quiet while tiptoeing to the fireplace mantle decorated with first photos of wrinkled newborns. My grandmother calls this her great-grandbaby shelf. I consider it merely a scorecard among my cousins. Having babies is important in this family. I have no pictures to give her. I am in last place. To the left of the great-grandbaby shelf, is a dusty table hidden in the corner. There sit two pictures of the one cousin that graduated from college. Maybe my picture can go there one day.

I leave my grandmother sleeping and walk down into the basement. The stairs are steep and I almost hit my head on the light bulb fixture my father walks into every time a storm comes. I walk past Ball Mason jars and spider webs to go through the door of my grandfather's garage. The Chevy Luv he was working on before he had his stroke is still there.

On the brick wall of the garage are the names of my cousins, Josh and Cody, in spray paint. My grandmother had been shocked that my grandfather stood by and allowed them to do this. I'm glad he did. I'd like to think he saw this as just another set of fingerprints cemented to this house.

Nightingale

Joseph Thomas Bullock

I'm leaving you
and in 20 years
if you care to know why
let this memoir
be an archive
a suicide note
tied to a dream
which flew the coop
on Nightingale wings

Migrating north
where the sting of frigid winter chills
were preferred
to sickly sweet aromas
spewing from the petals
of magnolia trees

Oh, sweetheart
I know you tried to keep me
with an hourglass figure
meandering around the turbulent Tennessee
I even swore
for one brief moment
that I saw a spark ignite
from the corneas
of your fiery opal eyes

Yet like most things
in the limits of this city
it was merely artificial light
beaming from the posts that line Court Street
a facsimile of so many facades
barren and hallow of what they pretend
but babe
I've always said you were beautiful

And if looks were enough
 I might consider clinging to the banks
 of your Muscle Shoals
 cause I've heard the Soul in your music
 it lullabies even the restless to slumber

A subtle rocking
 that made me motion sick
 from the get-go
 got me folding these hands praying
 God, make me a Freebird
 so I can fly far, far away
 from Sweet Home Alabama
 where the skies are so
 blue

And Lord don't I know it

'Cause I've got the blues
 in the birthplace of W.C. Handy
 and trust me
 that ain't nothin' nice
 it's the color of blood
 that hasn't had a chance to breathe
 an intolerance so suffocating
 it kudzu smothers
 life from the lungs
 of any untouchable cast
 that would rather die on their feet
 than live on their knees
 running faster
 than a speeding locomotive
 on an underground railroad
 where the ghost of Dred Scott
 sings
 I hate to see
 the evenin' sun go down
 gotta get up outta this sun-down-town
 gonna pack my truck and make a get-a-way
 to that St. Louis
 courtroom

where freedom will once again
 be denied
 but at least you get a second chance
 across the Mason-Dixon line

I swear I've
 kissed this red mud
 and spit on it in the same day
 but lady, what did you expect
 after sending the mixed messages
 of rebel flags and rainbows
 a crucifix and casseroles
 cradling me with southern hospitality
 in this valley of the unforgiven

where married men
 in hospital beds
 with HIV
 are dying
 for lives that were never their own
 because the only love they wanted
 was forbidden

That's why I'm telling every pulpit
 the blood on your hands
 is not from nails in your palms
 it's the residue of wounds
 cut so deep
 no tourniquet could stop their hemorrhage
 relentless as the tide
 that hugs your hips
 Lake of Fire
 burning holes
 in the esophagus
 of every soul
 who purges
 what's been forced
 down their throat

Florence
your rhythm
just missed a beat
with wild horses
dragging me
from the northwest corner
of this state beyond saving
and in twenty years
if you brag
on the names
of those who once called
you home
don't bother adding mine
because the only thing you had
was a feather in your cap
that fell from a pair
of Nightingale wings



Untitled 2

Jacob Jones
Merit

Staggering

Jesse Bradburn

Never spending any time at home
and getting to know the passed-overs of society:
drug dealers, ex-cons, and strippers,
all providing a couch to sleep on.
Learning the trades of drugs, drinking,
and doing both while driving.
Learning to cheat every form of authority but
always waiting for
blue lights, or
a door to bust open.
Fifteen or twenty men with badges and dogs
comb the place over,
always looking and threatening
with handcuffs.
Living on the streets
and asking for change
is never as good or as bad
as seen on T.V. and in movies.
Knowing that a warm home
is only a phone call away
but choosing to stay in
a car or a shed
with no one willing to hire
because of appearance.
Drug dealers offer money
for a simple favor:
Carrying a pound
from point A to point B.
The judge sits up high,
the boy, now a man
stands silently,
chained by the hands and feet.
Words are spoken but not understood.

The gavel finally bangs.
A man with badge comes over,
dragging the new prisoner
to a cell with twenty other prisoners
for the night.

In the morning a bondsman frees him.
A lawyer talks to the judge.
On the walk out, the lawyer says,
"Go back to school."



Ship on the Water

Daniel Evers
Merit

Questions and Answers

Ash Taylor

I sat there in class,
head never raised.
I never looked up,
not even for a sneeze from the back of the room.
I played with my pen—
it was a rocket that crashed into the desk,
repeatedly.
No one noticed at all.
Questions were asked by the teacher.
I knew the answers
but my mouth never even twitched.
In my head,
I screamed them out
and laughed heartily at others' responses.
My mouth almost smirked,
but I kept it all in.
No one noticed at all.
I daydreamed a little
about standing up and yelling at the top of my lungs.
I got that feeling you get
when you think of doing something
and know all you have to do is just do it.
I could just stand up,
open my mouth,
and let it out.
All I have to do is just...
I'm going to...
Here I go...
No! I can't.
I was on the edge of my seat,
my hands clenched the desk edges,
and my teeth sank into my lower lip.
No one noticed at all.
That was no place to let out my anger.
I'll keep it inside like I always do.

I'm so mad I could...
 and then my name was called.
 I looked up from my mindless trance,
 answered the question with the correct answer,
 smiled sweetly,
 and watched the room fall
 as my head collapsed
 and my eyes focused back on my pen.
 Now it was a superhero
 here to save the world from destruction.
 No one noticed at all.



Water Solution No. 1

Jesse Bradburn
Merit

My Eighteenth Birthday

Crystal Dill

The moment I turned sixteen, I began to count down the days until my eighteenth. In my mind, my eighteenth birthday would be a huge turning point in my life—the bridge to adulthood. I had everything planned out: I wanted a party. I wanted my friends to be there when I blew out the candles, but most importantly I wanted to mark the occasion with a celebration fit for the person who I thought I was. I had always considered myself to be an intellectual with superior tastes to those around me. I was the girl who read Jane Austen and tried to understand the underlying meanings of Shakespeare's plays. I thought I knew everything. Looking back, I cringe to think how ridiculous I really was.

Instead of a party, my eighteenth birthday was spent at church. Now, don't get the wrong idea, I wasn't kneeling before an altar trying to repent or searching for the meaning of life—nothing that altruistic. My father was dead, and we were burying him. I was so uncomfortable. Religion and I have had a long battle of misunderstanding, so this, coupled with the fact that my father was placed in a casket in front of the altar, made me feel just a bit out of place.

My mother was standing beside me. She looked like the walking dead in her severe black dress. I had to hold her up, because her rising blood pressure made her dizzy. She didn't say much to me. I had to do all the talking. I had to tell people where to go and what to do. I had to sign my father's death certificate and place the announcement in the newspaper. I wanted to grab my mother and shake her. I wanted to shout: "My father's dead! I don't know what to do!" I couldn't do that though, so I dried my tears and held my mother's hand.

My brother was on the other side of me. In my family, my brother is the hellion. If something went wrong, he was most likely the one who did it. But on my eighteenth birthday, he stood beside me quietly. His hands were in his pockets, and he rocked back and forth on his heels. In the middle of the service, he raced forward and threw himself onto the casket. I left my mother's side. My brother was wailing and clinging to the sides of the polished oak. I took his shoulders and whispered soothingly to him. I looked down at my father. He looked so peaceful; he looked like a man who stopped to take a long, well-deserved rest after

an arduous journey. At that moment, I envied him.

The service ended, and we stepped out into the brisk air. I had my mother's hand, and my brother had his arm around my waist. People gathered around us repeating words of encouragement and condolence. I wanted to push them away. I wanted to run. I wanted to tell them that nothing they could say would make the pain go away, so why were they wasting their breath? I remained silent, and walked to the car. I was so thankful that it was over that I wanted to weep, but I couldn't.

It might upset my mother.

I had just opened the car door when my aunt ran toward me.

"Wait, don't leave," she said.

I stopped and watched her floral print dress catch the breeze. She smiled at me—one of those pitying smiles people give when they want to make someone feel better without actually having to say anything. I hate those smiles.

"Happy birthday," she said as she gave me an awkward hug. After all it was an awkward moment. My father had just been placed into the gaping mouth of dirt that would chew on him until he was nothing but bones and dust, and she wanted to wish me happy birthday.

I embellished the moment by giving her a few awkward pats on the back and a muffled, "Thanks." Sometimes it is simply better to humor people and their good intentions, no matter how misguided.

She handed me a birthday card. I opened it slowly. I didn't read it. I didn't care what it said. I quickly took out the five one hundred dollar bills and got into the car.

"What did she want?" My mother asked while I hastily put the card in the glove compartment.

"Nothing, Mamma; she told me to give you this. She knows that money is going to be tight now that daddy's gone."

My mother took the money and counted it slowly. Without a word, she put it in her purse, and I started the car. It was my eighteenth birthday; I had just buried my father and sacrificed my birthday present for the good of the family.

I guess I was all grown up.

Granted

Joseph Thomas Bullock

You won
and I guess that's what
you always wanted
to hold the reigns
of a pulse run riot
beating fists
against the twisting of limbs
until someone cried uncle

But if you
care to keep record
remember
that I never did

Because losing your breath
is not the same as submission
it requires some sort of
informed consent
a signature
placed across the tight rope line
leaving nothing but leverage
in the hands of once tied
taught
tangled up

Surrender is granted
only when permission
has been formally given
and those words
were never birthed
so unless you
are hearing the ghost
of what we both wanted to say
but failed to mention
there's no reason to think

that I ever gave in
Because I have given up
enough times
to know the difference
quit everything I started
for the sake of believing
that walking away
is as simple
as kissing a stranger on the cheek

I've held steadfast to the notion
that all things in this life
are temporary
especially people

But I must give you credit
for helping me realize
how unfair it is
to speak poetry to an audience

that lacks the ability
to leave

Holding hostages
has never been a pastime
I've fancied
it is everyone's unalienable right
to be alone

But for those
who can't seem to bear the thought
I say this

Unless you were born a twin
you did not exit the womb
holding anyone's hand
and I can guarantee
you will not leave this earth
in the arms of another

so at any given moment
 you
 are the only one
 you've got

And I have danced to this mantra
 from time-out chairs
 in dark hallways
 to after school detentions
 through seven months
 locked in Bessemer County
 to the realization
 that nothing would ever change
 if I stayed where I was

So I leave every chance
 that I get

Because walking away
 is as easy as a one-night-stand
 and Lord knows
 I've had enough skeletons
 and rendezvous
 to fill a Smithsonian

So I guess I should be used to this

The only difference
 Is that my motives
 are never based
 upon taking control
 of what was once denied

Which is why I left your apartment
 for the cold November rain
 declined the umbrella
 you offered as a courtesy
 so I wouldn't have an excuse
 to come back

But there was so much that could have kept me
 from that subway train to 106th Street
 Like coffee
 at your breakfast table
 watching raindrops glide off the window sill
 while Coltrane plays something in the background
 that makes you feel the earth
 move
 but instead I'll give this victory
 to you

And if that
 is what you were after
 I wish you would have told me
 I would have given up
 long ago



Design #1

Kei Moriya
merit

Sister-O-Lantern

Micah Wood

I dreamt your body dismembered in a box.
The blood seemed to be absent, lodged,
As the tissue scarred and gelled.

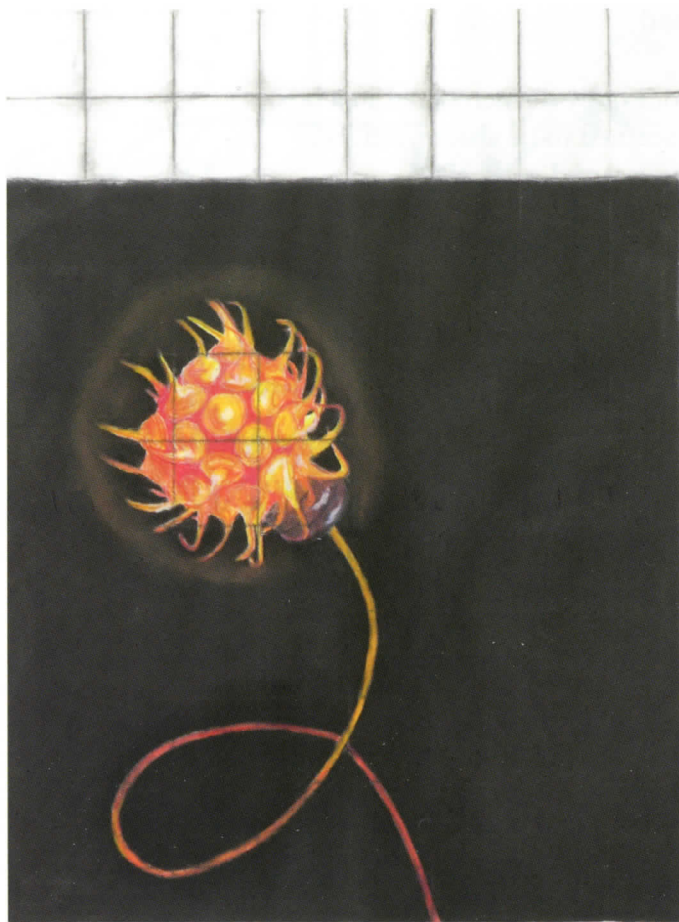
I resisted the relieving loss of life—
hoping, while resisting, that my prayers would
re-member the distant fading skin. I picked

up your trunk. The hollow pumpkin
surprised my eyes. Could my stammering mend
the missing seed scraped from your inward bowels?

The missing seed scraped from your inward bowels
surprised my eyes. Could my stammering mend
up your trunk? How could the hollow pumpkin

remember the distant fading skin? I picked
hoping, while resisting, that my prayers would
resist the relieving loss of life.

As the tissue scarred and gelled,
the blood seemed to be absent, lodged.
I dreamt your body dismembered in a box.



Untitled

Keely Finnegan
Merit

'Til You Make It

Megan McClellan

When I was just a little girl / I asked my mother, what will I be?...

Bullshit, Doris Day.

When I was a little girl, I asked what we were eating for dinner. I asked for money. I asked to go play with friends. My parents were the ones asking what would I be.

They asked me all the searching questions.

I was the one with the answers.

What respectable dentist can't at least spring for the mind-numbing lite rock hits from the 70s to today? Sentimental songs with sappy lyrics have no place here. No oldies, please. They're making me think.

"Ms. Gare-a-va-gee-a?"

I rolled my eyes, noticeably, I hoped.

"Garavalia." The second 'g' is silent.

As if I'd said nothing, the receptionist launched into her scripted performance: "We have a few forms for you to look at. First page is a simple update form – check that the address and insurance info are correct and make any changes or initial and sign at the bottom. Keep the second page – updated HIPAA. Sign the third page saying that you have read and received that copy. The doctor will see you soon."

"Thanks," I mumbled, taking the clipboard.

I slid into a seat across the room and flipped through the papers, signing where necessary. It was so funny to me in college when I went to an office like this with a friend. They'd look in shock at the pages, not understanding where to begin or having any idea what information would accurately complete the little boxes and blanks. This was my comfort zone. By the time I had my driver's license, my mother believed I was old enough to do this kind of thing myself. The second page, I took out, crumpled, and threw into my purse to eventually sift to the bottom with the other useless junk and trash. My address was not correct. I didn't change it.

I took the shiny plastic board (money wasted that could have gone to better music licensing, if they'd bothered asking me) back to the receptionist. "Just a few more minutes," she said with a big fake smile and a flip of her fuchsia manicured hand through her perfectly placed hair.

"I don't think I've ever seen such brightly-colored polish!" I replied,

with a matching, misleading I'm-not-making-fun-of-you smile.

"Oh thanks!" Her delight was genuine. My stomach churned.

As I slunk back to my seat in the dark far corner of the near empty waiting area, I flipped open my phone, which a placard at the entrance had cheerily asked me to politely turn off. I haven't worn a watch since I owned a cell phone; their expectations are unreasonable. Also, it was 11:45. My appointment had been scheduled for 11:15. I had signed in at 11:10.

"Fuck this," I mumbled under my breath. Maybe not quite as under my breath as I thought, since the woman sitting with a smallish child several seats down pointedly flapped the pages of her *Better Homes and Gardens* and flicked her eyes up to cast a stony glare in my direction.

I shrugged and waved my fingers at the little boy, who lit up with a wide smile.

I was spared further interaction by a woman with short, brown business-hair in pink and purple floral print scrubs. "Ms. Grav-gee?" she said, waving me forward.

I didn't correct her. But I did snatch my purse up, upsetting a stack of magazines, which I completely ignored.

She led me through a maze I would never be able to navigate again without assistance, though surely such assistance would be given with a poor-dumb-patient smile. She opened a narrow door onto a room the size of a closet entirely taken over by an x-ray machine.

"Let me slip this on you," she mumbled with her back turned to me as she reached for a heavy lead vest. She turned and slung it around my shoulders.

"There you go! Bite down on this!" She shoved a plastic bite plate between my teeth.

"Three quick pictures!" click. "Turn your head to the left!" click. "To the right!" click.

She slung my rolling chair around, and I realized there were actually two separate machines crammed into this cupboard. Between that and the vest, I began to sympathize with claustrophobics.

"Now for the pan-o-rama!" She really said it that way. The emphasis was on the "O", like something you might name a bowling event. She seemed quite impressed with it.

The machine slowly circled my head. I assume it shot strange waves of radiation through my face in the process.

The vest was once more secreted away on its hanger behind some clump of machinery. I was lead in a different direction through the maze I imagined lab rats racing through, searching for cheese. I think it was a

different direction, anyway.

Finally, the maze opened into a large area with a number of the familiar cleaning and examination chairs.

"The dentist will be with you in a moment," said Floral Print, and she walked out down a different corridor.

I sat and waited. I didn't look at my phone. Maybe not knowing the time was best.

After an indeterminate wait, a silver-haired man walked in through yet another entrance with an enormous manila envelope.

"Good afternoon! Let's take a look at your pictures." He did not, I took note, attempt the name.

He shuffled the big black sheets that looked like giant photo negatives onto a lighted board on the wall. "Well," he said in a light-but-stern tone I'd never heard from a dentist, "it looks like we've got a couple cavities here."

My jaw may have dropped. My eyebrows surely arched. I couldn't think of words.

"Yes, I see four definite cavities that will need to be filled." He snapped on gloves and took an instrument off a tray. I had yet to speak, but a dentist doesn't need permission to lay your chair back and forcibly enter you.

"Here, and here, and here, and then this little guy here."

He paused after each "here" to tap at a different spot in my mouth that suddenly seemed sensitive. I hadn't noticed anything before, but now I realized it hurt for him to prod there with whatever the hell that metal thing in his hand was. A tear, completely against my will, welled in one eye and slid across my temple into my hair line. I struggled to close my mouth, and he quickly withdrew his hand.

"It's nothing to worry about!" he said, getting up. "Marrisa will give you a good cleaning, and they'll schedule your fillings at the desk!" He left. I couldn't remember now if the exit he took had been used yet. I felt like I was in a Scooby Doo cartoon. Eventually they'd all come through the various doors at once, slam into each other, and collapse in a heap before getting up and scrambling away again. I laughed. I was not hysterical.

I don't know how long I laughed, but a woman came in from somewhere over the course of it. She looked at me a little oddly. "I'm not hysterical!" I said, both a little too loud and a little too shrill. "I've just never had a cavity before!"

Which was true. Never before in my life had I had any such dental

misfortune. My teeth, like my father's, were perfect. He had yet to have a cavity and was pushing 50. My mother, of course, had a mouth spotted and speckled with spots of metal. But that didn't matter, because I had my father's teeth. And none of it mattered, because neither of them was within 500 miles of here.

As the hygienist snapped on her gloves, I laughed again, but briefly, and wiped a few stray tears from my face. One gloved finger glided over the row of instruments, scouting for the correct one. She told me to open.

"What could cause that?" I asked. "What could cause me to go my whole life without getting a cavity and then suddenly I have four?"

"I'm not sure." She was tentative, and eyed me closely. "Are you ok?"

"I'm not hysterical! I guess I just... I know! Oh, I forgot how pregnancy plays with your body! I've heard it leeches the calcium right out of you! How silly! And the crying, the laughing! Hormones!"

My forced laugh was apparently more reassuring than any laughing I had done so far. I threw in the big fake smile that had won the duel with the receptionist, just in case.

"Oh of course! No need to explain! I was all over the place during my pregnancy!" She visibly relaxed, her face softening, her free hand releasing the fabric of her teal scrub pants unconsciously knotted in her fingers, no longer afraid I was in some way unhinged, ranting about cavities. Who rants about cavities? They're par for the course around here, surely.

She settled into pregnancy chatter and cleaned my teeth. The four spots that the dentist had tapped ached. I suspected it was the tapping that caused the ache in the first place. I ignored her chatter, while politely responding. They always expect you to talk at the dentist, as if they don't have a handful of sharp objects needling around your gum line.

I wasn't pregnant, but we were both happier with the lie.

I sat on the city bus with the card that Fuchsia Fingers had given me still in my hand. "Miss Garvaglia, don't forget to stop in May 29! We'll fix that smile in no time flat!" My name, improperly spelled, and the date were printed on blank lines. The card was a yellow that made me nauseous.

"Got a toothache, honey?"

I was pulled from my reverie by a middle-aged black woman in the seat next to me. She had not been sitting there when I got on, and I had no recollection of her plopping down beside me.

"I didn't before I went to the dentist."

"That's the way it always is!"

I smiled a weak, slow, genuine smile.

I hadn't even noticed this woman sit down so close to me that our thighs just brushed to the jostling, bumpy road rhythm, but now she sat there looking at me. She was slender, wearing a lavender velour tracksuit. She held a compact black clutch in smooth, slim, elegantly long fingers.

When she looked at me, it was not the expectant look of the hygienist in teal pants, waiting for a specific and measured reaction. She did not look concerned. She smiled warmly and blinked at a normal leisurely pace, not sizing me up but waiting to see what was next.

"I told the woman who cleaned my teeth that I was pregnant so that she wouldn't think I was crazy. Actually, not so that she wouldn't think I was crazy. So she wouldn't think I was scared. See, I've never had a cavity before. I've never had anything before. I've never broken a bone, or chipped a tooth, or sprained my ankle! I've had perfect health my whole life. Not perfectly normal health. No – abnormally perfect health. My friend once called me a 'freak of dental nature.'"

I paused and laughed nervously. I looked over, and she wasn't looking at me like I was crazy. She was looking at me like she was listening to my story. Her lips still curved in a slight smile, and her face was turned fully toward mine, leaning very slightly in toward me. She nodded and even laughed at my friend's little joke. She showed every beautiful textbook sign that I had learned in speech class of a person actively listening. Some nervous compulsion made me begin telling her my story, but I continued because she was listening, and because I found her listening pleasant.

"Well, I'm normal now. I've got four perfectly normal cavities. I've just never had one before. Everyone else is so scared that it scares me. I don't know what's going to happen or what to expect. I should have gotten past this when I was four, but no, not me. I had to be 26 before my teeth ever gave up the fight with decay. I had to be 26 and alone. Of course I did."

I didn't laugh. I didn't smile. I think my lip trembled a little, and I know my voice did. What's normal? Two hours ago I was a bitter girl in a dentist's office, faking my way through all the stupid pointless pleasantries of the day from a deep and urgent sense of expectation, and of obligation. And that was normal.

"Honey, you're gonna be fine. It's not even as scary as they make it sound. It might be a little sore for a while, and you won't be able to feel part of your face maybe. Don't try to eat anything right after. You just do

what your dentist tells you, and you're gonna be fine, baby. Just don't let it worry you. You're never alone. Today when you felt alone, you talked to a woman on a bus. See, there's always someone around."

I smiled again. "Thank you. Thanks for not letting me be alone."

"You're welcome, honey. Anytime."

"When you were little," I have no idea what made me ask, "did you ask your mom what you would be?"

This new normal seemed to be playful banter, a give and take I hadn't had since I moved to the big, bright, hollow city.

"What do you mean?"

"You know, 'Will I be pretty, will I be rich?'"

"I never even thought to ask that kind of question. I asked what we were having for dinner! But if you wanna know, you're already pretty, honey, and being rich ain't nothing to worry about. This is my stop. I hope your mouth feels better."

"Thanks."

She got up as the bus lurched and squealed to a stop, and I watched her walk up the street as I pulled away. It was a familiar feeling.

I slid my phone out of my purse and flipped it open. I tapped out a text. "Love you. Miss you. Need you sometimes." I checked the boxes in my phonebook, Mom, Da, L'il Sis, BFFJAKE!.

I sat with the phone in my hand, just staring. Another spacey, indeterminate time passed, and my stop was next, coming up quick.

I pressed the red button, flipped the phone closed. Message deleted.

molotov cocktail

Hayley Sylvester

burn, baby, burn!

rage

riot

flames

chaos

knees have just been capped,

meaning –

you couldn't walk anyway because of all that vodka in your system.
stand in the breadline.

out in the cold.

shuffle your feet, slowly, a dirge around the glass coffin

where your ruble is on display because

it used to mean something.

now it's an object you desire

a faceless sheet of paper

for a failed objective.

it's the reason why you've filled a glass bottle

full of petrol, lit the fuse,

and thrown it.

burn, baby...

Orange Julius

Matthew Mallard

Life is an open book
waiting to bite my hand.
Eyeing this carnivorous book,
smelling stale pages,
hearing crisp paper, and
feeling rough edges,
I thirst for its contents.
This book sounds as though
I feel it in my soul.
Paulo Coelho wrote it
in his native Rio de Janeiro—
life is a closed book.
I've burned every last one
while enjoying a jerk-off, but only
because I'm a hormone raged young man, right?

Don't let's ask for the moon.
We have the stars,
the shining stars of ambition,
ambitious as high-school dropouts trapped
behind greasy counters of a burger joint.
We reached into the sky and pulled down every last star—
El'Malley plucking down the seven sisters
foreshadowing the seven deadly mistakes I'd make.
Orange mistakes, bright and sour,
I'll pull those down from all the trees in Antarctica, as well.
Veni, vidi, vici, I defiantly murmur.
The waters stand and
prevent me from crossing oceans
and conquering the sky,
as I row across land on a wide-open book.



Untitled

Makiko Shimbukuro

Merit

Offering

Matt Mallard

I watch from the window
as snow freely falls
to the ground. In Alabama,
snow is as rare as heat waves
in Antarctica.

Wispy white whirls around campus
through the air and the night
gets darker. I can barely make out
Romeo and Juliet
through the cold panes
and wonder
what they're thinking.

They're thinking
they wish we'd stop
bringing them offerings.
One night it was popcorn compressed
into Romeo's outstretched hands
and smeared across Juliet's lips.
Another night, it was balloons
shaped like sex toys

one on Romeo's head
and another in Juliet's hand.
Then we placed gummy orange slices
into Romeo's outstretched hands
and smeared across Juliet's lips
the candy so she looked
as though she were smiling
with a clown's mouth,
bright and orange.

She thought it tasted sour.

But now they're standing
by the sidewalk near dead roses
with nothing in Romeo's hands
except a few flakes of sticking snow
and nothing on Juliet's lips
except the whisper of the cold.

"I'm cold," she'd whisper.
"I know," he'd say.
"I'm cold, too."

"I love you," he'd whisper.
"I know," she'd say.
"I love you, too."

And they're made from
metal and stone, constructed
from some sculptor's idea
of how the star-crossed lovers
should appear. Some speculate
about the sculptor's sexuality—
Romeo has an abnormally paunchy rear end.

But this is poetry—
an offering of truth
cast in stone
what the prolific Bard of Avon
scrawled onto paper years ago.
Even he was not original.



Abandoned

Christopher Hughes
2nd place 2D

Truant

Megan McClellan

The sun, beautiful to behold
Rose high this morning, shone bright gold.
And the light plays bright on my face
as we sit here in this still place.
But this time is soon disrupted,
laid waste, fouled, early corrupted,
For an hour-long trifle of a thing,
a buzzing nuisance and quick sting.
Unless, perhaps, we could, say, stay
Keeping, by staying, time at bay.

For a day like this is wasted
On the foolish thoughts we've tasted
In those old, dark and musty rooms
And men so old to be entombed.
Their lecture, dry, quiet, witless,
Would bring an end to this small bliss.
Is the business we have to mind
Not as important as their wind?
Why should we be made to delay
our work and fun this sunny day?

Put aside all hesitations,
Thoughts of dull recitations.
Be here, be present, be absent
From one terrible hour-long stint.
Though we cannot stop it coming,
must attempt to outrun the thing.
Linger, escape those lesser parts
And give flight to our truant hearts.

"All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling."

Hayley Sylvester

In a cozy pub, somewhere British,
with my friends and sweetheart, we
laugh, make jokes, and drink ourselves intellectual
in order to devise some sort of formulaic approach
for what we deem as art, literature, and poetry.
No matter if we don't agree;
we banter over drinks, the round table discussion
where we are all equal through the bottoms
of pint glasses.

One of us extols the virtues of modernity,
how "accessible" it is to the masses.
My sweetie-pie does it, his Virgoan features illuminated orange
from the flickering neon lager sign over the bar.

He tells us what he thinks in slurring, proper English,
tipping his drink precariously and
quotes someone only he has heard of.
But he is adamant as he pounds his palm
on the shiny tabletop:
"Yukio Mishima said to live your life like a poem
written in your own blood!"

He could do no wrong in my eyes,
and he was always analytically correct.
I would be too drunk to care
if he was or not,
nor could I hold my head up without help
from my elbow.

"That's morbid, pal," the moody Scotsman growls
to his trainers, the only one of us
who could genetically hold his liquor.
"If you think that's morbid," Virgo continues, a twinkle in
his mercurial eyes, "You should check out his death poems!"

"What is poetry?" I ask my friends:

the bouncing, fluffy grue; the metalhead rock-collector; the emo pelican;
and Pookie. (Sweet Virgo is buying another round.)

In a desperate attempt, I do my best to sound witty and
not inebriated or stupid.

"Don't choo think poetry is a lot like math?"

Had I been sober I could have explained what I meant.
Had I been sober I would have never talked about math.

Poetry follows a logical formula
depending on the type of poem.
A sonnet has a set structure:
fourteen lines,
iambs five times,
quatrains,
and stuff.

A simple calculation of $2+2=5$.
The 5-7-5 of a haiku
is restrictive.
It works,
just like $10+10=11$.

Words are like numbers;
plug them in the equation –
out comes a poem.

The problem is that creativity isn't formulaic,
only the bounds we impose on it are.
Had I been sober I could have explained this.

Instead, I manage the only thing I could recite
(sober or drunk)
"The great Oscar Wilde once said..."

the end of the table and I he

ere was plenty

I can't really explain w



re is no special period in